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The London Child

BY

EVELYN SHARP

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

This book does not claim to be more than a few chapters in the life of the London child of the people, written by one who was once a London child and perhaps on that account has always had a fellow feeling with modern Young London. It is intended for the grown-up reader and is not in any sense a children's book. All the experiences narrated are real experiences, and the six story-sketches included are nearly all founded on some fact. The substance of some of the chapters has been used before in the "Manchester Guardian," the "Daily Herald," and the "Weekly Westminster," to whom acknowledgments are here made.

E. S.

CONTENTS

	PAGE.
AUTHOR'S NOTE.	
INTRODUCTORY.	I
1. MEWLING AND PUKING.	11
2. TODDLING - - - -	
THE DAY NURSERY.	24
THE NURSERY SCHOOL.	37
ANDY.	55
3. CREEPING LIKE SNAIL.	64
4. PLAYING - - - -	
IN THE STREET.	84
PARK AND PLAYGROUND.	92
THE PLAY HOUR.	99
DICKY.	105
5. BEING ENTERTAINED	
THE PICTURES.	111
THE PANTO.	120
BILLY AND YOUNG FLO.	128
6. DRESSING-UP - - - -	
THE SCHOOL PLAY.	137
THE CHRISTMAS PARTY.	143
EDWARD, B.C.	152
7. PLAYING IN SCHOOL- TIME - - - -	
ON THE COMMON.	159
IN THE SWIMMING-BATH.	168
8. LEARNING IN PLAY- TIME - - - -	
ON A PLOT OF LONDON CLAY.	178
IN THE CHILDREN'S LIBRARY.	187
9. BEING NAUGHTY - -	
THE CHILDREN'S COURT.	198
ON PROBATION.	206
THE CERTIFIED SCHOOL.	214
EXPLOITATION.	222
STEPHEN.	225
10. BEING ILL - - - -	
THE SCHOOL CLINIC.	230
THE HOSPITAL.	239
GOING AWAY TO GET WELL.	245
ELSIE.	248

LIST OF PLATES IN COLOUR

	PAGE.
THE CHILDREN'S LIBRARY - - - -	Frontispiece
A SUMMER EVENING IN EAST LONDON	Face p. 84
THE PLAYGROUND IN THE PARK -	„ 96
THE CINEMA QUEUE - - - - -	„ 112

THE LONDON CHILD

INTRODUCTORY

SOMEWHERE about 1880, a little girl might have been seen almost any day in the year looking out of a top-floor window in one of the London squares. She was a lonely little girl ; for the Victorian family fell by sheer force of numbers into groups, and the other members of her group, being brothers, were away at school for three-quarters of the year. The schoolroom group led its own life downstairs ; so did elder sisters who went to dinner-parties and dances, chaperoned by parents. On the top floor, except in holiday time, the child at the window had the whole of the nursery and its outlook to herself.

Perhaps, staring so often at the limited view which represented nearly all she knew of the outside world, she dreamed more about the future than would be considered quite healthy in a modern child. It filled her with dread. Nothing in her experience made her want to



grow up, to share the dull pursuits of people who appeared to spend all their time in doing things that she heartily detested. They drove round and round the park in the afternoon, a ceremony that for her, on the rare occasions when she took part in it, meant sitting on the back seat and trying not to be sick. They had what they called an "At Home" day once a week, a ceremony she could not regard as any mitigation of the horrors attendant upon growing up, for she judged it by her own misery when they summoned her to the drawing-room, numb with shyness, to answer the perfunctory questions that visitors in those days commonly put to defenceless children.

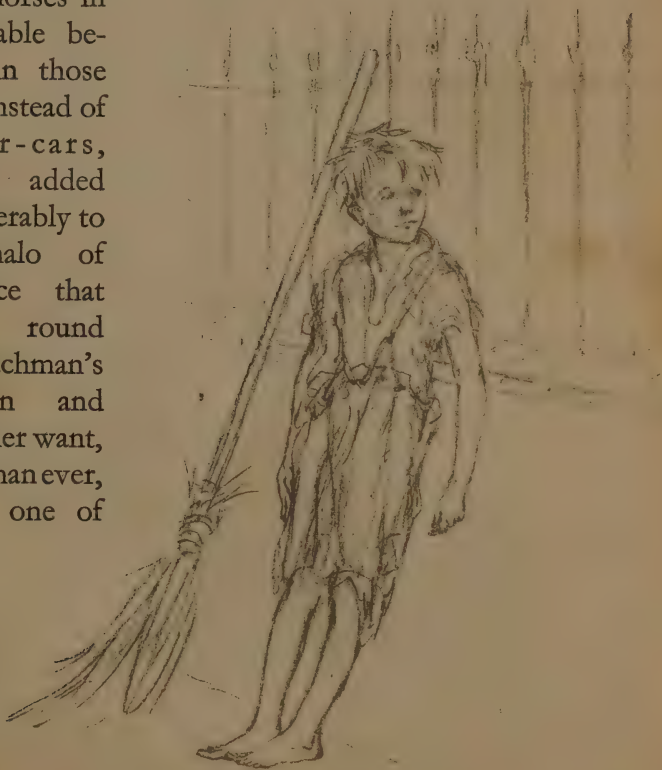
It was true that grown-up people could go to the theatre as often as they liked, instead of being limited to one pantomime and one circus a year. But hearing them rave about Shakespeare and try to imitate Henry Irving, she agreed with her brothers that this form of elderly diversion did not compare at all favourably with entrancing excursions, however rare, to Drury Lane and Hengler's Circus. Besides, grown-up people had to go to concerts as well ;

and except for one glorious occasion on which she went to a Handel Festival with a father who fortunately showed no signs of ever intending to grow up at all, she associated concerts with a dim and dismal St. James's Hall, where awful fidgets assailed you as soon as classical music set in for the afternoon.

From this it may be inferred that at least one London child did not know how the other half of the world, even of her own world, was living in 1880. She had no idea that she stood at the dawn of a new age that was going to revolutionise all childhood, especially that of the London child, besides showering opportunities at the feet of the grown-up people of whom she dreaded to become one. No rumours of coming emancipation reached her in her nursery on the top floor; to her, growing up meant having nothing to do, and she longed to do things.

Meanwhile, a little ordinary freedom in childhood would have done quite nicely to go on with. She wanted desperately to be free of the streets she saw from her window, and she envied the coachman's children who lived in the mews

round the corner in a charming dolls' house over stables, up to which they climbed by an outside wooden staircase, and which conveyed a romantic impression of being dotted all over its front with flowers in bright green window-boxes. There were horses in the stable below, in those days, instead of motor-cars, which added considerably to the halo of romance that shone round the coachman's children and made her want, more than ever, to be one of



them. But most of all, she wanted to change places with the ragged crossing-sweeper who stood at the corner of the square, just below her window.

The crossing-sweeper looked no older than a brother might be when he went away to a public school for the first time. Day in and day out he stood at his post; he was there when she looked out at breakfast time, and she left him there when she went to bed at seven o'clock. He kept the crossing beautifully clean, which was of some importance at that time, for the rest of the road did not seem to get swept at all; and even when there was not a speck of dirt to be seen on his crossing, he would give it another ostentatious sweep round if somebody appeared in sight who looked productive of coppers. He had neither shoes nor stockings on his feet; his tangled mop of a head was bare, and his clothes were wretchedly torn and insufficient. He shivered pitifully in every cold wind and was frequently wet through; and hardly anybody ever seemed to stop and give him a penny, still less a thought. Yet the wink and the impudent grin with which he flung a

witticism at the cabby, who sat hunched up on his hansom at that corner of the square, made him brother to every little Londoner of to-day on whom the nearest Care Committee keeps a motherly eye.

The child who watched him from above envied him with all her might. His was a freedom she never would know. He could do what he pleased, untrammelled by manners; he was never crammed into a best suit and sent downstairs to be polite to strangers; he did not look forward to a dreary future filled with dinner-parties and classical concerts and Shakespeare. There would always be adventures waiting for him round the corner; though, of course, she did not call them adventures, she called them "things to do." At the same time, she realised in a kind of way that all the children she saw enjoying the freedom of the streets were not of an equal social standing. The coachman's children, no doubt, realised this very firmly; and the child at the window knew perfectly well that the Poor—who meant anybody outside people's windows—were divided roughly into those who asked for pennies, and those who didn't. And

she knew that there were some belonging to the former division whom she very emphatically did not want to change places with.

There was, for instance, the tragic group of outcasts who once trailed across her vision and left an unforgettable picture in her mind. The man and woman, indescribably slatternly, slouched along by the railings of the square wrapt in hostile silence; a tiny wisp of an infant wailed feebly in the mother's arms, demanding in vain everything that it had a right to enjoy in God's world; while some yards behind, making ineffectual attempts to catch up the others, toddled a little bundle of rags that appeared to be a girl. Now and then, after one of these unavailing spurts, she emitted a despairing little cry; now and then, the man swore at her over his shoulder. But most of the time her two guardians just dragged themselves along, dehumanised by physical wretchedness, and paid her no heed at all. So the gap between them grew wider, and the panic-stricken child, powerless to ward off the calamity that seemed inevitable, appeared to be outstripped by the time they all vanished out of sight.

I believe every child is haunted by the fear of being deserted by those who represent all it knows of protection against the intangible perils of darkness and space—a fear that is particularly vivid in the mind of the town child, because it seems so much more possible to get lost in the crowded street than in the kindly open country, where darkness is only a matter of growing accustomed to the twilight of the sky, and not of being abandoned to devils in a place where lamps throw terrifying shadows. So, with the inconsistency that is the common human portion of us all, the London child of 1880 looked out of her nursery window and longed for the freedom of the streets, while she allowed the spectacle of that deserted child—she never wholly lost the impression that the parents meant to desert it—to haunt her for the rest of her life.

But the ragged crossing-sweeper, to whom she gave a hot and hoarded penny from time to time, suggested a debonair existence that she could not have defined, though she knew it was quite distinct from that savage instance of destitution, and equally so from the discreet

respectability of life as led in a flowery dolls' house over stables. Even when grown-up cynics told her that the little rascal had sold the mittens she laboriously knitted and presented to her tattered hero, she refrained from making the reasonable retort that he might have wanted to buy food with the proceeds, because that did not fit in with her conception of his careless bravery in the face of hunger and cold and other accompaniments of a free life. She preferred to think that, like another gallant gentleman whom she worshipped in her history book, he had given the mittens to some one whose need was greater than his. And it is possible that she was not far wrong in her estimate of the way that the poor behave to the poor in all ages and all countries.

CHAPTER I

MEWLING AND PUKING

A WHOLE new London has grown up since a Victorian child looked out of her nursery window into a world where little boys swept crossings instead of passing their standards at school, and babies were hawked about the West End to entice pennies from the charitable, instead of being shepherded decently into the welfare centres of their own drab neighbourhoods. Little girls of the 'eighties have lived through greater changes than their mothers ever thought to see; and the product of those changes is seen in the little new generation that is now knocking at the door. For the greatest change of all has taken place in our view of childhood and our treatment of the child.

Decidedly, the beginning of all this goes back further than the 'eighties, to the period, in fact, of the greater Victorians, and especially of

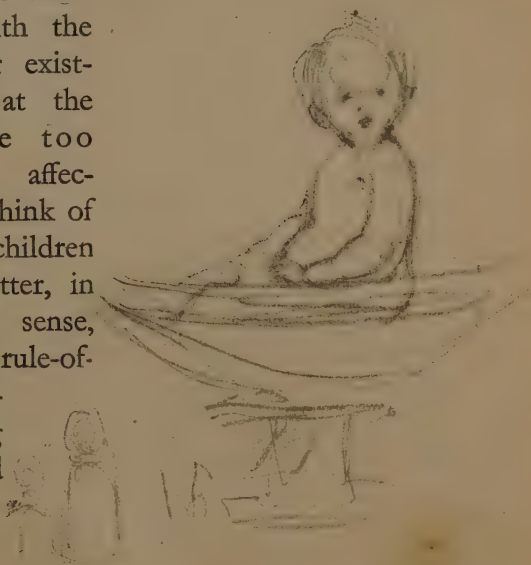
Charles Dickens, who was more responsible for the revolution it implies than any social reformer who has ever worked for it. It was he who awakened the more imaginative public to a sense of the way the children of the poor were exploited, an exploitation that began at their entry into the world under the dubious auspices of a Sarah Gamp or some workhouse official, who between them made of childbirth either a vulgarity or a tragedy. None of the psychologists who have since brought child study to a science has taught us nearly as much about

children as Dickens revealed to us in Paul Dombey and David Copperfield and Pip and Jo and the Marchioness, and the rest of his boys and girls, who are known wherever English is read, and even better known sometimes where English is translated. To the Londoner the best of his types will



always be his cockney children, though, after all, this is not wonderful. For Dickens himself was surely the greatest child that London ever threw up out of her darker depths.

To the child of the people, lacking nearly everything that makes of childhood physically a gracious thing, the change has so far been largely a material change. The modern apologetic parent, who no longer expects his children to be grateful for being born, is seldom as yet to be found in the ranks of the poor, most of whom are too much occupied with the struggle for existence, and at the same time too primitively affectionate, to think of giving their children anything better, in a spiritual sense, than the old rule-of-thumb upbringing they had

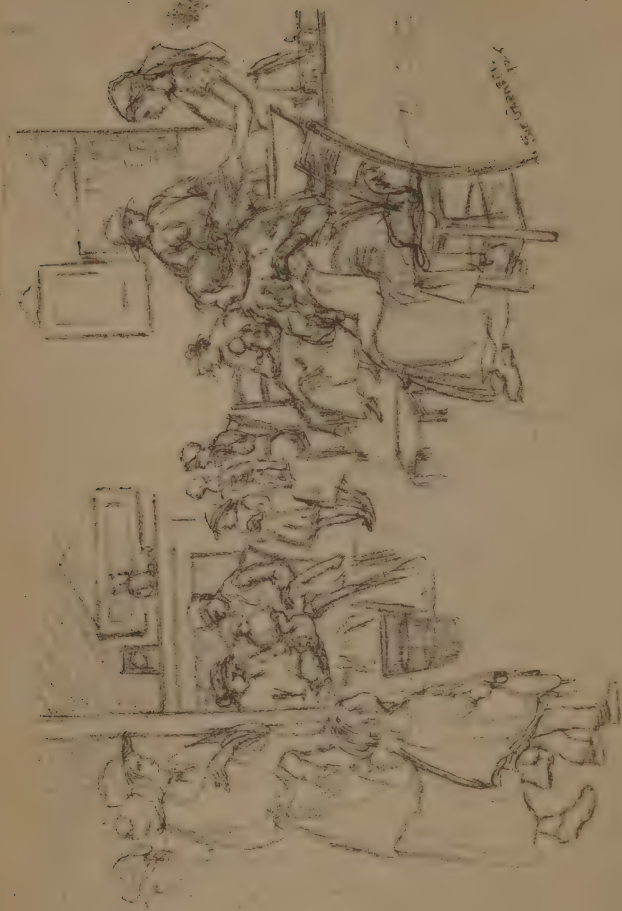


themselves. The new psychology reaches their children only incidentally—a little in their schools, a little when they leave school and meet it as vocational psychology, and occasionally when they find themselves in the Children's Court before a magistrate.

But no one can say how great a moral and mental change may be wrought through satisfying even some of the material needs of the children who are born in a London back street. In these days, all kinds of people are striving to give the little creatures at least a good start on their life's journey. Between philanthropy and officialism, the chances of their drifting into vagabondage have been so far reduced to a minimum that one sometimes feels, remembering an ancient longing to escape from a sheltered childhood into the freedom of the streets, that there may be some meaning in the cynicism of the over-educated little boy, who, on being asked what he would like to have for a birthday present, replied that he would like to have half-an-hour to himself.

The London baby rarely gets half-an-hour to itself. (I do not apologise for referring to any

baby as "it," because, apart from the insuperable absurdity of the English language, every mother will agree that her baby is "IT.") Its arrival is heralded beforehand when the mother goes to register the coming event at the nearest maternity centre. This means that quite a number of people are interested, besides herself, in the birth of her child. At a certain hospital maternity unit—the pioneer one at the Royal Free Hospital—she is passed on at once to the almoner, to whom she confides the details of her home circumstances, what fees she can afford to pay, whether she needs the help of an outside organization that provides meals for expectant mothers, whether she has younger children to be looked after while she is incapacitated, whether in short her home can be made suitable for the baby's reception, or whether she will have to enter the hospital maternity ward. The almoner's answer to a visitor's question, whether all this was properly the work of the hospital unit, was significant in its simplicity. "What are you to do," she asked, "when a woman with a bad heart is going to have her eighth baby, and she is living



in one room with her husband and seven children ? ”

This might be called an extreme case, perhaps ; but the worst of it is, there are many extreme cases in a London that is over-populated, though, as the same almoner added optimistically, “ It’s not so bad as it used to be. Before ante-natal care work was heard of, it was quite usual for a doctor to arrive in a home where no preparations of any kind had been made, and the baby had to be born on a heap of straw on the floor.” In spite of many difficulties, however, mothers always prefer to stay at home if possible, rather than have their baby born in the hospital ; and this very natural desire seems to account slightly for the delirious joy with which an expectant mother burst into the almoner’s room one day.

“ I’ve got it ! ” she exclaimed without any preamble. For a moment, the surprised official scented a miracle ; and indeed, her surmise was not far out, for although it was the acquisition of a clean room, and not an addition to her family, that was thus dramatically announced, this took on almost a supernatural complexion in a neighbourhood where at that time numbers

of poor families, able to pay for rooms but unable to find any, were sometimes driven to spend the night in the waiting-room of one of the large railway stations. There is clearly no end to the variety of experiences through which the London child of the people may pass, beginning before it is born.

Still, it does not often in these days start its career on a heap of straw on the floor; and

that is something. Nor need it be neglected after its arrival; for the compulsory notification of its birth ensures the call of the health visitor, who in her turn paints in glowing colours the charms and advantages of the welfare centre, to which the baby can be taken weekly, there to be weighed and admired and generally encouraged

to grow into a satisfactory toddler. Of course, all mothers do not attend welfare centres, which



are sometimes run by private enterprise and sometimes by the municipality ; but the right sort of health visitor can do a good deal to persuade an intelligent mother to make use of one. Other mothers can do still more by their example ; for it is naturally intolerable to find somebody else's baby getting on faster than one's own, simply because the little upstart has been attending the "Babies' Welcome" down the street.

The baby's progress has been rapid since the first London welfare centre was opened in St. Pancras at the beginning of the century. It is not often in these days that an infant is brought to be weighed, as it frequently was at this very early "Welcome," enveloped in six layers of cotton clothing and two tight binders, leaving incidentally its lungs, shoulders and arms quite unprotected. Nor are babies now "sewn up for the winter" in unsuitable garments, as they used to be in some parts of the town before we knew better. And although it is still difficult to forego the pleasure of giving the baby "a bite of what we have ourselves," so that on Monday mornings in some crèches a

regular dose has to be administered to counteract the effect of a week-end spent at home, it is only rarely now that the baby who comes to be weighed at the welfare centre requires to have its mouth cleared of suet pudding and currants.

And the true story of the East End mother who said sadly of her ailing infant, "I tempted him with a whelk, and even that did him no good," sounds in these days like a prehistoric jest.

But, wise as every one is growing, mothers still have to be reminded by a fearsome picture of a bow-legged infant that "Baby must not walk too soon," and by similar instructive diagrams that the fly is its deadliest enemy, that it must be fed by the clock, and other important precepts. I should have thought that the baby itself

ensured the latter course of action; for I once visited a maternity home in Moscow at four o'clock in the afternoon, which happened to be one of the prescribed feeding hours, and



although there was not a clock that went in the building, and there is no such thing as the right time, or any time, in the whole of Russia, when four o'clock was struck by the sun, every baby in the establishment—there were quite forty—informed its mother of the fact with a punctuality I never again encountered in that delightfully unpunctual country. At the same welfare centre the visitor was also informed that the diagrams on the walls were rendered essential by the illiteracy of the mothers, who could not learn mothercraft in any other way. But London mothers are not illiterate; and the same visitor thought she had hit upon the true inwardness of the diagram in this country, years ago, at the St. Pancras School for Mothers, where these instructive pictures were hung all round the waiting-room; for the conversation of the waiting babies, when uttered in unison, as it always was, offered more than enough reason for placing all instructions where they could be seen though not heard.

Certainly, there is no crude, uncultured peace for the London baby of to-day. After it grows out of the jurisdiction of the welfare centre

anything may happen to it, from sunlight treatment to free dentistry, before it goes to the elementary school ; and from the very earliest age it may become an inmate of a crèche for five days out of the week. But there are unofficial pauses in the life of the most carefully studied infant ; and these are generally filled up by playing (vicariously) in the street, where it is handed over to the care of the ex-baby or some older child, who in most cases is a girl. It is difficult to praise too highly these little nursemaids of the poor, into whose power the tiny mites are delivered for good or ill ; and anybody who questions their skill should try to compete with them in hauling the baby about, whether in the course of transition from home to playground, or in the more highly skilled process of lifting it by its middle, laying it face downwards on the lap, and there patting it professionally during an attack of indigestion. Nor are they to be condemned offhand for occasionally snatching a moment of recreation for themselves, when they may be found playing some pavement game a few yards off, leaving their charge to scream in passionate indignation, unnoticed by

all save those to whom it does not belong. That is almost the only time a baby of the London by-streets ever gets to itself; and, as every distracted grown-up listener in the neighbourhood can testify, it commonly lasts a good half-hour.

Truly, the London baby, whose mother chooses to take advantage of modern aids to its upbringing, rarely gets any time to itself. But one must pay for importance in this world; and the importance of the baby in the best welfare set was demonstrated very pleasantly, one day, when the matron of a day nursery was paying a round of calls in a particularly squalid neighbourhood. Entering a dilapidated building, that had long been condemned but was still of necessity inhabited by those who had nowhere else to go, she remarked to the friend who accompanied her, "The ceiling fell on the bed here, the day before yesterday. Fortunately," she added brightly, "the baby was in the next room."

In the face of this superb sense of values, it became impossible to ask how many mere grown-up casualties had occurred in this catastrophe.

CHAPTER II

TODDLING

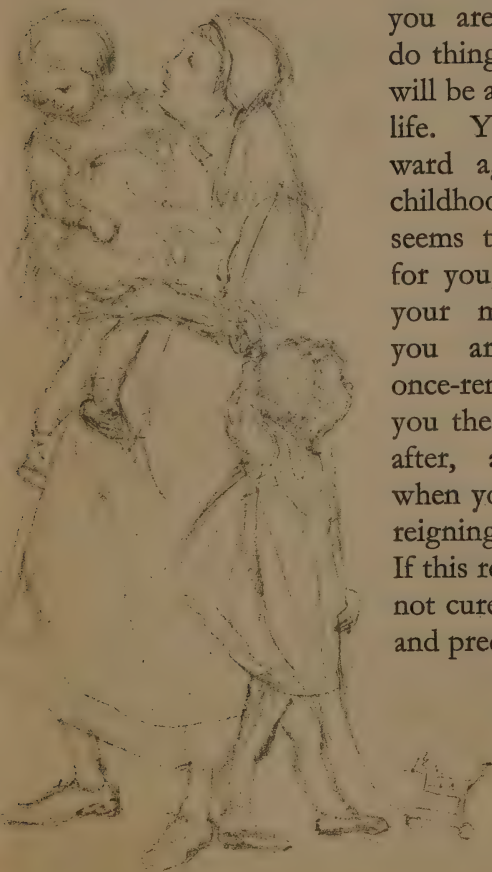
The Day Nursery

IN the world of back streets, you are a toddler from the time you cease to be a baby in arms until the time you reach the compulsory school age of five, when a fatherly State rediscovers you and enters you as an "infant" in the nearest Council school. But by that time, if you are a London toddler, you are a man about town. It is the period in between, when you have more or less outgrown the nurses of the welfare centre and can still (in a statutory sense) snap your fingers at the school teacher, that you are difficult to place in the scheme of things.

You have ceased to be the cheapest mouth in the family to feed, and you have become the dearest—that is, if you get all the eggs and milk you ought to have. Your position is ambiguous and undefined. It is nobody's business to look after you, though as long as your world offers

you an unlimited supply of knives, scissors, pins and motor traffic, you need more looking after than anybody else in the family. You have

nothing to do, although you are more eager to do things than you ever will be again all through life. Yours is the awkward age of London childhood; no one seems to have any use for you, except perhaps your mother, who, if you are the ex-baby-once-removed, will give you the ex-baby to look after, and sometimes, when you are a girl, the reigning baby as well. If this responsibility does not cure your wandering and predatory habits, she is driven to go round to the headmistress



and ask how soon you can be admitted to school.

This is not the place to revive the controversy over the "under-fives"—the cant official name for the toddler—that arose when Circular 1,371 was issued by the Board of Education in the autumn of 1925, with the object of discouraging, on the plea of economy, the practice followed in many Council schools of admitting infants between the ages of two and five, to a kind of preparatory class conducted on nursery school lines. Next to the establishment of a nursery school, this would seem to be the one of the best solutions of the problem of the toddler in back streets. But, with or without encouragement from Whitehall, lowering the school age is not a universal practice; and in any over-populated London district, the head of the elementary school to which children below the statutory age are not admitted is generally beset with appeals from mothers to take these difficult young people off their hands before they reach the age of five.

This does not mean, naturally, that the toddler's mother is wanting in the feelings of a parent. The child who is neither the eldest

nor the youngest of a growing family, and has no particular social standing in the home, is of necessity left to shift for himself; and the mother who remained indifferent to the perils that consequently strew the toddler's path would be a monster. One of these harassed parents came one day to a school in dockland where there was no provision for the "under-fives," and besought the mistress, not for the first time, to admit her Johnnie who was then just four-and-a-half years old.

"Unless I keep my eye on him all the time, off he goes to play by himself in Ratcliffe Highway, though he has to cross two bridges and the tram lines to get there," she explained, and added, not resentfully but rather as a statement of fact, "I've had two drowned, and I'd like to keep Johnnie." To be free of the streets becomes a tragic privilege at that



end of the town, where dangerous little footpaths run between wharves straight down to the river. By a queer stroke of irony, only an Act of Parliament can secure the provision of gates to fence off these death-traps, because the inhabitants of Wapping were once granted the right of free access to the river as a special privilege, and no mere local authority can repeal that ancient piece of benevolence.

The toddler is no doubt a terrible fellow until the Ministry of Health is quit of him and he passes into the care of the Board of Education. But sometimes—and no wonder!—he is bored and peevish rather than adventurous; and then his plight, humanly speaking, is even worse, for life seems to have nothing to offer to the toddler who is not bold enough to seize it by the throat. With good fortune, however, these small persons, who at their age spend so much of their time falling down, do occasionally fall on their feet in a day nursery, and more occasionally still, in a nursery school, and so find a bridge over which to toddle happily into the comparative maturity of elementary education.

The crèche, or day nursery, is run either municipally or privately, and, subject to the fulfilment of certain conditions, comes under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Health from whom it can then obtain a grant. It is open to children under five whose mothers go out to work and can pay the necessary fee, varying from sevenpence to tenpence a day. A typical crèche may be found on one of the pier-heads in the Port of London, in a fine old Georgian house, built perhaps a couple of hundred years ago for some merchant prince, and now peopled all day by babbling youngsters and crowing babes. Its round bow windows look out on a wonderful panorama of shining water, dotted about with all kinds of river craft, from motor launches to barges with brown sails that go to and from the Kentish ports. The daily occupants of the crèche can hardly be expected to appreciate all this; for when your outlook is bounded by a four-foot-square "playground," you know nothing of beautifully proportioned rooms and a well-staircase. And when your head does not reach above the window-ledge, you are scarcely in a position to rave about the Whistler nocturne

framed in the window above. But I should think these things made a considerable difference to the grown-up community there—matron, doctors, nurses and helpers—who, day in and day out, are trying to give the rising generation in that congested district of London a good time as well as a good start.

One day nursery is, no doubt, much like another. Here you have, as elsewhere, clean, airy, whitewashed rooms, where the mothers leave their children in the morning on their way to work ; bathrooms where they are washed on arrival and dressed in print frocks ; dolls' house chairs and tables at which they take their three

meals a day ; a medley of toys and books, and above all, kind and merry young women to play with them and to teach singing-games and action-songs to the toddlers among them. It must be a very pleasant change from



being locked indoors while your mother is out at work, or locked out of doors, which is sometimes the alternative fate of the child who is supposed to be old enough to take care of itself with an occasional glance from a neighbour. Even the charms of dodging trams in order to play in the main road must fade, in this river-side crèche, before the joy of playing in the sand-heap in the garden below; while there is a lovely sun-room built out over the river, in which, with windows all the way round that slide open at will, exhausted young rompers can enjoy their daily sleep, and incidentally get all the fresh air and violet rays that clever people have lately discovered to be more precious than coronets or Norman blood—especially than Norman blood, whose corpuscles, presumably, are blue instead of red.

Only forty of them can revel in this airy bliss; for the State insists on as many cubic feet for each inmate as



would make hundreds homeless in the streets round about, if the same regulation were applied to them. But they are forty radiant youngsters, reclaimed temporarily from the more harmful effects of bad housing ; and the greatest marvel of them all is Martin.

Martin was twelve months old when he came to the crèche. He was the youngest child of a docker who had been out of work for two years, except for some casual road-making ; his mother earned a few shillings a week by rag-picking. There were two other children, and they all lived in one room in a blind alley blocked by gas-works ; the sun never penetrated there, and every house in the street reeked of the smell of gas. It would be difficult to give any baby a worse start than that, and Martin was no Hercules to begin with. When he first appeared in the house at the pier-head, his wasted little body just turned the scale at thirteen pounds ; he had had pneumonia and bronchitis, and suffered so badly from rickets that his hands and feet were turned inwards and his head lolled sideways. His eyes were nearly closed ; but when his sight began to

improve within two days of his sojourn in the crèche, the inference was drawn that he had been losing the use of his eyes merely through living in semi-darkness, as fishes are born without eyes in an underground stream. A similar case was once seen by the visitor to a school clinic, where an older child came up for examination who had gone nearly blind through the narrowness of the outlook in the street where she lived ; there was found to be nothing organically wrong, and she recovered completely on being sent into the country where long views and wide spaces enabled her to use her eyes as God meant them to be used.

Martin was too pathetic an object to be sent back every



evening to that gas-poisoned, sunless home. Heaven knows what would have become of him had he lived in the days of Dickens's *Marchioness*, or even of the baby that wailed in the arms of the vagrant who wandered past the window of the Victorian child in the 'eighties. But the *crèche* made an effort and adopted him temporarily ; and light and air and food transformed him within six months into a lively little rascal whose only sign of abnormality was a certain backwardness in talking, a defect that I understand has since been rather more than rectified.

Fortunately, all the babies who find their way into day nurseries are not in Martin's plight ; for clearly, it is not the business of the *crèche* to take boarders, however pathetic in their appeal. But the majority of *crèche* children do suffer from minor ailments, largely the result of the pitfalls that surround them in their home life, not the least of which is the sophisticated diet on which they are too often reared.

"Not that you can blame the parents for that," one *crèche* matron said to me, not long ago. "They do their best to buy special food

for the children, but in most cases they can't afford the extra expense, which simply means that the tinies have to share the family meal, whatever it is. And sometimes," she added feelingly, "it is corned beef and potatoes for a baby of ten months; or stewed chicken's feet, with the chance of swallowing a claw, for a toddler of two!"

It must be very dull for one of these precocious diners off bully beef and chicken claws to be degraded to a wholesome breakfast of rolled oats and milk, bread-and-butter, and an apple; a dinner of gravy and vegetables, with rice pudding to follow; and a tea of bread-and-syrup, with milk to drink. But the effect on the children of this exemplary diet and its variants is so startling that it probably accounts for the willingness of parents, as poor as theirs, to pay a regular daily fee they can ill afford, and explains the fact that there is always a long waiting-list on the books.



There are not nearly enough day nurseries in London for all the children of all the mothers who go out to work, even if the daily quota of pence were always available. So it is to be hoped that there are compensations, unseen by us, lurking in the gutter for the toddler who is driven there to seek the fruits of the spirit that should be the portion, unsought, of every child. Perhaps, shut out from home and day nursery alike, these seekers in the garbage heap find a shining treasure that is hidden from the rest of us; for it is probably true to say that if we knew what the little explorer Johnnie is after, when he goes forth so persistently to look for it in Ratcliffe Highway, we should be a little nearer to knowing what God and man is.

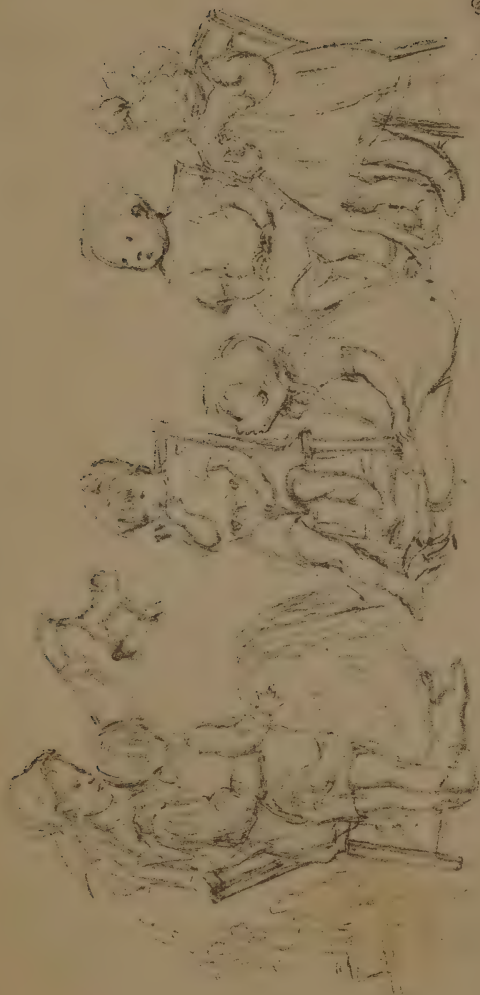
The Nursery School

There is little doubt that the ideal solution of the problem presented by toddlers everywhere, but particularly in London and other large cities, is to enrol them in a nursery school. In the nursery school, toddlers are never allowed to feel that they are not wanted; there they get the beginnings of an education that could not be bettered for a millionaire's children, and there they lay the foundations of all the good mental and physical habits that only an exceptional nature can properly acquire later in life. The greatest of these is, possibly, the habit of happiness; for the child who goes to a nursery school learns unconsciously to regard happiness as a right rather than an accident, and that seems to be as good a way as any other of beginning to build Jerusalem in a land that is only sometimes green and pleasant.

But the nursery school is still a luxury only occasionally to be found. Although powers to

establish nursery schools were first given to the local education authorities by the Fisher Education Act of 1918 (and may be found in Section 21 of the Act of 1921), very little advantage has yet been taken by County Education Committees of this rather remarkable statutory permission, principally, no doubt, for financial reasons, but also very largely because both the authorities and the ratepayers who control these authorities have yet to be converted to a sense of the value of nursery schools. Most of those to be found in London owe their existence to private enterprise, although they are eligible for financial aid in the form of grants, both from the London County Council and the Board of Education.

Some of these London nursery schools are less ambitious than others, but in all of them the attempt is made to keep the children as much in the fresh air as possible, whether by means of a garden or a flat roof, or only with the aid of wide-open windows. The one open-air school, which may be regarded as the pioneer among nursery schools, is Miss Margaret McMillan's camp school at Deptford, a living



memorial to her late sister, Rachel McMillan, who helped to start it.

If you can make an open-air school at Deptford, you could surely make one anywhere. All round it are the narrowest and dreariest of little by-streets, crammed close together and jostling one another right up to the unpretentious wooden fence that marks the boundary of the school. "The camp where the babies go?" says a bystander, who for once does not turn out to be "a stranger in these parts" when addressed by the visitor. "That's it, over there, through the little door in the fence." One goes through the little door in the fence, feeling as if one were going right into the heart of a fairy tale—and suddenly, with the added sensation of being a giant (a kind giant, of course, not an ogre or anything unpleasant of that sort), one finds one's self *in* the fairy tale.

Even the dug-out just inside the door—once the entrance to an air-raid shelter—has been transformed into a delightful thatched hut, with yellow marigolds growing all over the roof, in which small people in brilliant-coloured overalls can make-believe to their hearts' delight. The

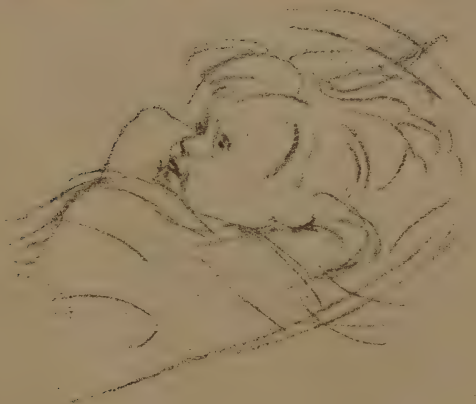
rest of what was once a dreary piece of waste ground, destined for the erection of an ordinary Council school, has become a flowering garden, with real little grass plots and interesting flower beds, that are full of things that grow there and are not put in ready-made; with winding gravel paths, and bent old trees whose drooping branches anybody with a passion for climbing can easily explore. Round the borders of this beautiful oasis are wooden shelters, all open on the garden side, one of which contains the kitchen and living-rooms of superintendent and residential staff, while each of the others is a self-contained class-room—if you can give such an academic title to something that belongs properly to a fairy tale—in which various little communities of boys and girls, divided roughly into two-year-olds, three-year-olds, and so on, play and sing and eat and sleep and paddle (in the broad shallow bath) all through the hours that they do not spend in the garden itself. Each shelter has its “mother,” as well as one or two jolly-looking helpers in blue linen frocks and white head-dresses. Your first impression, as you enter this charming place, is of a garden

in which the flowers sometimes grow on stalks like ordinary flowers in any other garden, while the rest run about on bare legs.

In the nursery school, the child is the thing. Nothing else really counts. At home, Alexandra Rose, a chubby thing in a pink pinafore, may be only the ex-baby; here she is a person, solemnly matching colour-blocks and discovering with a shout of triumph that one of them also matches the visitor's handbag. At home, Godfrey is really rather a nuisance to an overburdened mother unable to satisfy his craving for interesting occupations; but here, at dinner time, with an apron buttoned tightly round his slightly rotund form, he is a monitor, and overflows with importance as he carries a dish of fish and mashed potato to the table for which he is responsible, and stands over it like a dragon while the four-year-olds help themselves with solemnity to their own portions, as if they were little dukes and duchesses being waited on by a powdered footman.

Then there is Dorcas Elizabeth, prominent in the "conversation lesson," with which the mother of the two-year-olds is "widening their

vocabulary” by producing, one after another, a medley of toys and other objects from what is called a wonder-bag, inviting a description of each from the tiny scholars who sit around. At home, the visitor is told, parents have little time to spend in talking to their babies, and the toddlers often come to the nursery school as backward in talking as though they were still infants in arms. Dorcas Elizabeth appears to be making up for lost time, however, and on the few occasions when words fail her she contrives to remain a centre of interest by placing her feet negligently on the table. This is the top class of the two-year-olds, which may




account for the prowess of Dorcas Elizabeth. I am not sure what position Rosebud Smith—a little creature whose sharp intelligent face is surmounted by the largest red bow I ever saw on so small a head—holds in the school; but in the after-dinner sleep, when all are coaxed to lie down on green canvas stretchers, inside or outside the shelters, she certainly stamps her bare feet on the baby who is already asleep in the neighbouring bed, like any established pupil in any school who wants to impress a new girl.

It is wonderful to see how children of this sort, drawn from the poorest homes in crowded streets, respond to the healthy conditions under which they pass five days of the week, from eight in the morning till five in the afternoon. Only those who have just come there look as you would expect children from such a neighbourhood to look; the others are all as bonny as young John, who was threatened with an operation for hip disease when he first came, two years ago, but



is now as lusty as any four-year-old in the school. It is not surprising that the mothers of the district are willing to pay to the school a shilling a week for their children, a fee that covers half the actual cost per head of three meals a day in addition to a pint of milk, and even includes the cost of fuel and cook's wages, although it should be added that gifts of food and the co-operation of kindly tradespeople help to keep down expenses and to facilitate economic buying. It is equally comprehensible that the school, which was at first financed entirely from private sources, is now State-aided, and that the London County Council, instead of keeping the rest of the site for an elementary school, have used it instead to erect an extension of the nursery school in their own name.

By far the best result of the nursery school is seen in the free, natural children it turns out, wherever it happens to be situated. Here at Deptford, they give

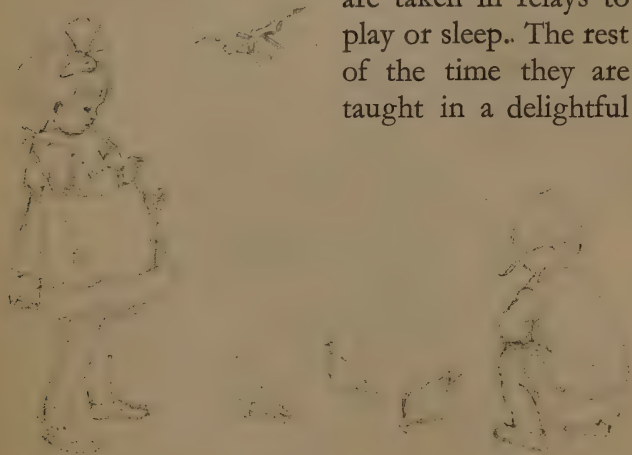


a spontaneous welcome to the visitor who feels like a giant among elves, instead of staring shyly, or giggling, or otherwise being self-conscious. -With it all, they remain ordinary little human creatures, who cry lustily like any other "under-five" all the world over if they fall and bump their head, or are unexpectedly slapped from pure *joie de vivre* by an exuberant comrade. But they do not whine, nor do they seem bored. They never tire of working off their energy by climbing in and out of "Jumblegym," a capital gymnastic apparatus in the middle of the playground. They adore squatting on their heels and feeding the pigeons, or running after the helper who tends the rabbits and other pets that live in various enclosures about the place. In fact, the best thing one can say about these nursery scholars is that they are extraordinarily like happy healthy children everywhere; and that cannot be said of all the children who swarm in London by-streets.

Waves of economy in educational circles do not throw up many nursery schools on the shore of London childhood. You may find them at

Notting Hill, in Poplar, Somers Town, Romney Road, Kentish Town, and elsewhere ; but there are not nearly enough to take in all the toddlers who have to bridge over the gap between Nature's infancy and the official infancy of the elementary school. Still, to have had the nursery school even recognised in Education Acts is a fine score for the toddler, and encourages private enterprise in the matter.

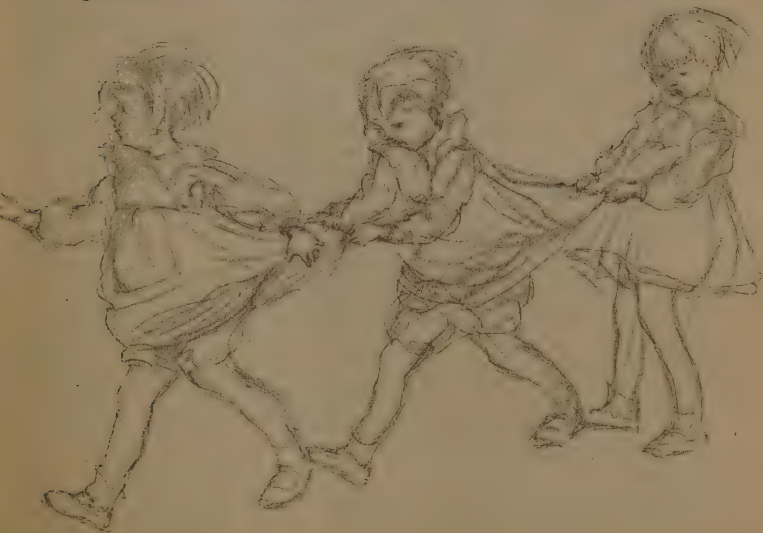
A very attractive indoor nursery school is held in the Children's House at Bow, which possesses a flat roof up to which the children are taken in relays to play or sleep. The rest of the time they are taught in a delightful



ground-floor hall, which is almost as light and airy and sunny as if it were out of doors, where flowers stand about in jars or grow in pots, and coloured pictures hang on the walls. The same visitor arrived there early one morning with the pupils, some of whom were brought by older brothers and sisters, while others seemed to wander in by an instinct that never failed to land them at the bright green door. Now and then, a father, on his way to work, deposited a toddler on the steps with a parting kiss; and one independent little creature hovered doubtfully on the threshold though only to assert a freedom of choice the House would certainly do nothing to curb, and on hearing from a helper in the passage that there was a new picture book inside, she decided to put off playing truant that day, and has probably been putting it off ever since.

The first effect of visiting a nursery school is to make the grown-up visitor feel terribly and disgracefully old-fashioned. It is really painful not to give a helping hand to Tommy in the orange-coloured overall, when he carries a chair to the wall, climbs unsteadily on to it

and proceeds to hang up a largish picture that has fallen down ; or to stand inactive over a still smaller creature in red linen, who perilously lifts a pot of buttercups from the table and carries it to where the teacher is patiently waiting for the children to gather round her in a semi-circle ; or to avoid running to the aid of the tiny scrubber enveloped in a rubber apron, who fetches soap, flannel and a bowl of water from the bathroom and proceeds in a professional manner to wash one of the tables. But to help the children to do things belongs to the dark ages of child study ; it simply is “ not done ”



in the new nursery school. You would no more dream of giving unsolicited aid to one of these growing, experimenting little pieces of human protoplasm than you would think of saying "Don't" to them. Nobody grown-up ever says "Don't" in a nursery school; and nobody there who is going to grow up some day is ever given the chance, through being thwarted or interrupted, of feeling either discontented or unoccupied. Of course, the children are sometimes furiously annoyed with one another, or with the teacher; but that is another matter.

The visitor who feels disgracefully old-fashioned in a nursery school (even when quite enlightened outside it) marvels at the super-human patience of teacher and helpers. It must be so tempting to take an occasional short cut to discipline, to say "Hush!" or "Make haste!" instead of waiting until the tune at the piano has penetrated to variously occupied minds and suggested to them that it would be



fun to assemble for singing-games, or songs, or musical exercises. It would be so much easier to hurry the choice given to all the children of the educative toys in the cupboard, instead of waiting until they have weighed the advantages of each one in turn and at last carried the chosen box to the most distant table, and then wandered off to fetch a chair from another unnecessarily distant spot. It is true that the teacher then shows the child in question how to use the toy; but this is done only once, after which the child is left to do it alone, whether it involves shaking sound-boxes and matching them in pairs, or making chalk diagrams with the help of stencils, or getting used to the look of letters on picture blocks, or any other diversion that would never have been called "lessons" in any visitor's young days.

But the result seems to justify the means; for one tiny fellow, having shown a remarkable sense of hearing when given the sound-boxes to manipulate, was afterwards found in the roof playground beating a strange rhythmic measure out of a tin can, a box and a stick. Only the grown-up and unregenerate visitor would

compare this *laissez-aller* existence with a more distant childhood, in which such an experiment in musical rhythm would have been called a manifestation, not of genius, but of original sin, and dealt with on that assumption.

There are moments, however, when a blissful silence descends even upon the place where nobody ever says "Hush!" or "Don't!" One moment is when teeth are being brushed on arrival in the morning. This is a process ingeniously rendered attractive by the bright appearance of the bathroom, where each child's towel, washing-flannel and toothbrush are labelled, not with a dull number, but with a flower or some such symbol that any illiterate young toddler who runs may read. An equally absorbing moment occurs later when hands and face are washed, though this proceeding entails a certain amount of conversation, because the



charm of turning on taps that perform the daily miracle of supplying inexhaustible hot water is so intense that attempts are made to lengthen it indefinitely by the recurring enquiry—"Please, is my face clean yet?"—to which no helper, unless totally immune against the temptation to court popularity, could return an answer invariably in the affirmative.

A rather quieter time is reached when the school settles down to the pleasures of the table, although this blessed period is preceded by a good deal of clatter while the tables are being laid by the children with many-coloured mugs and plates. The only completely peaceful time in the day is the hour of sleep that follows the midday dinner, and it is a peace that is not lightly achieved. Nobody is put to bed sternly and told to stop there, as in the days before children were understood; and some of these modern individualists require more time than others before they gravitate of their own accord towards a canvas stretcher and condescend to be beaten by Nature. But peace is achieved at last; and knowing how impossible it is for the parents of such a neighbourhood to give their

children, even at night time, the cool and undisturbed rest they ought to have, I sometimes feel that for this sleeping time alone the crèche and the nursery school alike deserve to exist and to flourish. But there are many other reasons, too. If the grown-up visitor sometimes feels disposed to smile at the excessive tenderness shown towards the toddler's idiosyncrasies, that unregenerate tendency is in reality provoked by envy of a childhood in which there is little or no encouragement to acquire a feeling of revolt against small injustices that may afterwards obscure greater injustices, more worthy of assault in a Christian world.

I think there will always be something characteristic about the toddler who comes from a nursery school. People like Tommy of the orange linen overall, and Dorcas Elizabeth who is not snubbed when she talks too much, and Rosebud Smith who wants to stamp on those who sleep too heavily, and Godfrey who can wait at table in a check apron, do not see meekly with other people's eyes, or hear with other people's ears, when they go back to the swarming, noisome streets to which they belong. It

is lovely when clever parents catch the infection of the day nursery and the nursery school, and try to make a paradise of their toddler's home with bright chintz curtains and colour-washed walls and window-boxes in the back-yard. But it is lovelier still when their toddler, coming out of one of the places in which he has unconsciously learnt to see with his own eyes and hear with his own ears, can make all that and much more of any dark and ugly spot in which he may find himself during the rest of his life.

Andy, I believe, is rather like that.

Andy

Andy sat back on his heels and wondered what was wrong with his house.

He had built it on a rock in the middle of a lake: that was for solitude. He had made a long flight of marble steps, starting from the edge of the water and leading right up to the front door: that was for grandeur. He had even planted a high hedge right round his

house, so that interfering people should not come spying on him when he sat at home planning adventures. It ought to have been a perfectly good house. But it wasn't. There was something wrong with it, and he could not think what it was.

The puddle in which he knelt soaked slowly through his cotton pinafore, and the patched toes of his boots dug themselves into the flower-bed he had helped father to make, only last Sunday. That had been in its way a kind of adventure, too. First, any amount of old bricks and slates had to be cleared away and deposited, when no one was looking, in the lane that ran along the back of the row of houses where Andy lived. Then the ground had to be pecked up with the coal hammer and an old knife, and the hole filled up with earth abstracted guilefully from the waste land down by the canal, and brought home after dark in the wash-tub.

This foundation was then nicely covered over with a layer of real mould, supplied by Miss Beniton, a lady with a taste for landscape gardening, who went about encouraging people to make flower-beds in their back-yards. It was

Miss Beniton, too, who gave father the lobelia and pansy roots that now languished limply in close proximity to Andy's boots.

Altogether, it was a very fine effort; and Andy had nothing against father's flower-bed, except, of course, that it was father's.

His house, on the contrary, was his very own; and as he gazed rapturously at the shining lake and the marble staircase and the stiff impenetrable hedge, the splendour of his invention completely blotted out the dull little back-yard and its yellow brick wall, and the scullery door that yawned open, and the line of washing fluttering overhead, and the zinc dustbin and the cat's saucer.

"It is but a back-yard," said mother's voice, deprecatingly.

"Don't say that," begged the visitor who was following her politely through the scullery door. But the vision that burst upon her put a severe strain even upon the politeness of Miss Beniton, who had lived long enough in Andy's neighbourhood to expect almost any kind of dull ugliness in a back-yard. "Is that your

little boy?" she asked, welcoming a side issue with enthusiasm.

Andy's mother admitted that it was. "Get up out of your father's flower-bed and shake hands with the lady," she commanded.

"I'm not in father's flower-bed," objected Andy. This was ungracious, possibly—even rude; but it was not untruthful, though appearances were against him. Andy was, in fact, the only person in the back-yard at the moment who knew that he was kneeling in a marble house in the middle of a lake, with a hedge all round it. And he was still wondering with all his might what was wrong with it.

The sortie from the scullery should logically have dispersed his imaginings. But, as every dreamer knows to his cost in a logical world, imagination never moves so swiftly as when conditions are thoroughly unfavourable. So it was, on this occasion, with the unfortunate builder of marble mansions.

"Andy!" a disapproving mother was saying over his head, in the slightly unnatural tone induced by the presence of a visitor. "How can you tell such a story?" She turned

apologetically to Miss Beniton. "I've never known him do such a thing before," she declared, in the hope of being believed that springs eternal in every mother's breast.

Andy interrupted her with a sudden and piercing yell. "*I* know what's wrong wiv it!" he shouted ecstatically. "It's got to have a gap in the hedge, so as I can see right froo it, all over the whole world, and right round the back of the sun, and . . . and . . ."

The foot of the avenger came down with a heavy splash in the middle of a puddle; and two bricks and several pieces of firewood and some scraps of slate fell from their high estate in Andy's house, while a circle of decaying cabbage stalks was rudely broken. Even mothers make mistakes sometimes and see puddles where there should be lakes.

Andy had got his gap all right—but through it he could see nothing but a back-yard, with a brick wall and a zinc dustbin and a cat's saucer with a large blue-bottle fly crawling over it. Overhead, some visitor or other was asking him all the usual questions that only naughty little boys never want to answer.

On a fine Sunday afternoon in June, Miss Beniton sat at tea with Andy and Andy's father and Andy's mother, in a back-yard that looked rather as if it had got loose from an ideal home in a certain kind of housing exhibition. The ugly yellow wall was hidden behind green trellis-work, covered with long strings of cotton which were attached hopefully to minute seedlings below, while, jutting out from the scullery door, perhaps with the ultimate intention of concealing it from view, was another piece of trellis-work, similarly covered with cotton aspirations.

Father's flower-bed, an amateur affair at best, had developed into a cemented pond, in which two goldfish eternally avoided each other with haughty flicks of the tail. In the middle of it was a miniature fountain, turned on by a tap in the scullery. (Andy liked the fountain better than anything, and had already put it out of action twice.) There was also a home-made sundial of doubtful scientific standing, in the place where the dustbin used to be, and a herbaceous border—Miss Beniton called it a herbaceous border, and her word, as that of an

expert, was taken without question—all along the foot of the wall.

The ground, now cleared of bricks and slates and cabbage stalks, had acquired the artistic temperament produced by the scrappy pavement known, but unfortunately not treated, as “crazy,” so that the tea table gave little jerks when mother made the tea, and kitchen chairs turned into see-saws as readily as dustbins into sundials. But these little things were not nearly so disturbing to the equilibrium of the tea-party as the interest taken in them by the neighbours, who, as neighbours will, pretended to be far too polite to notice anything unusual about Andy’s back-yard, but made no effort to induce a similar sense of splendid isolation in their children; so that sprightly little boys and girls, who would otherwise have been taking tea indoors, came out instead into their own back-yards, where they mounted dustbins that had not turned into sundials, and made remarks to the sky overhead.

“Have you ordered the Daimler or the Rolls Royce, to-day?” one youngster would ask another in a loud affected tone, meant to suggest

an Oxford accent ; while Andy, to his surprise, was addressed as "Percy" and asked why he had not put on his velvet suit with the lace collar. All this was very perplexing to Andy, whose fancy had never roamed in the direction of velvet suits and lace collars ; nor could he imagine why he should be called Percy when his name was Andrew Richard.

Still, as his mother observed, you must expect this kind of thing if you strike out a new line for yourself ; and she looked away from the row of heads along the top of the wall, and feasted her eyes instead on all the glories of the little universe in which Andy had once built a marble mansion. "Transformed," she remarked to Miss Beniton. "That's what it is, and no mistake."

"It's certainly wonderful what you can do with a back-yard," allowed her husband, as he tried to slaughter one of the many flies that seemed to be looking for the vanished dustbin. "I should never have thought of it myself," he added genially.

Miss Beniton smiled with the pride of the creative artist. "You only want a little

imagination," she explained modestly. "Just imagination. Nothing else, you know."

Andy, balancing himself on his chair and taking what the gods sent him in the way of jam sandwich, did not say anything at all. He had even forgotten the rude boys and girls who continued to balance themselves on dustbins and stare over the top of the wall. He was wondering with all his might what was wrong with the back-yard.

CHAPTER III

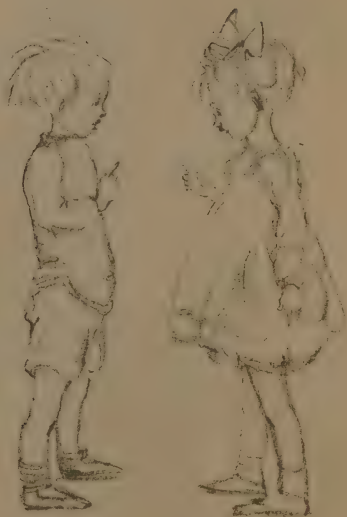
CREEPING LIKE SNAIL

THE London toddler who survives the many perils of the toddling years and reaches the age of five becomes an "infant," and, if he has not already been admitted as an "under-five," begins his official education at the nearest elementary school. This does not mean that he creeps there unwillingly, in Elizabethan fashion. On his first morning he is conducted by a very willing mother, who rejoices in the knowledge that at last he will be preserved for some hours daily from knives, scissors and motor lorries; and on subsequent days, whether he is led firmly to school by an older child or goes independently, he probably trots along willingly enough. Home, despite the fascinations of cutlery and motor traffic, is not so exciting to the toddler as to make school seem tedious by comparison.

Besides, according to people who go to conferences and talk about education, school is fast

losing its ancient terrors; and it no longer transforms the toddler, if it ever did, into a crushed and submissive infant. "In my young days," said an L.C.C. school inspector at one of these annual meetings of pedagogues, "infants were penned in their desks and not allowed to speak; but to-day they move about freely and talk to one another and to their teachers." And another speaker told a Unitarian Conference that schoolchildren now think for themselves and ask any questions they please, being "no longer subject to having instruction poured over their heads, as were their fathers and mothers before them."

One enthusiastic head-master went even further when he declared in public that "the gospel of freedom has been preached; we are friends with our children, believing that intellect and character alike are



stirred to fine effort in an atmosphere of goodwill."

All these declarations of independence seem to indicate that a totally new view of school has arisen since a little unwilling Shakespeare crept like snail to the horrid place. There can be no room in this new conception for the inferior teacher, for it is clear that if infants are to be free to roam about the class-room, occasionally throwing a kind word at their mistress, she will have to be a woman of uncommon resource and equipped with an iron nervous

system, or there will be very little difference between the infants' school and the street. And if their elder brothers and sisters mean to ask unlimited questions instead of having instruction poured over their heads in the dear old convenient way,



every teacher will have to be as complete a compendium of general knowledge as parents would like to be when they take their child out for an airing and are submitted in public to a fire of inquiries about everything in heaven and earth.

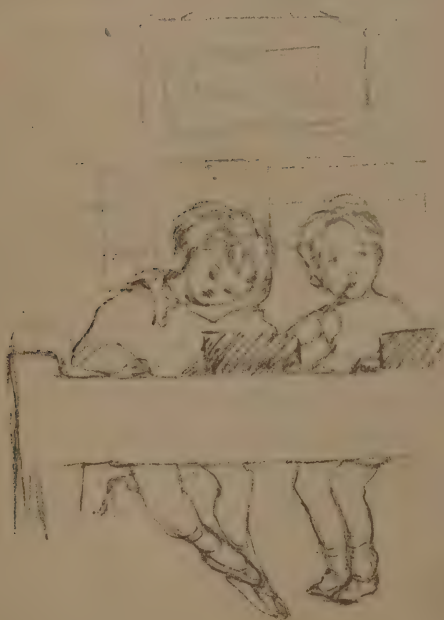
It is, however, just conceivable that the news of their deliverance has not yet filtered through to all the children in our public day schools. From occasional visits paid to these seats of learning one has gathered that some boys and girls are still enmeshed in the old-fashioned pedagogy, and are quite unconscious of their newly acquired right to ask questions and think freely for themselves. Such children must be a sad disappointment to the enthusiast fresh from a conference; but they will certainly be much easier to teach, especially if there are fifty or sixty of them in a class.

But the teacher, too, sometimes behaves as if there were no such thing as educational theory, and, stoutly declining to allow the young idea to sprout entirely as it will, even descends on occasion to stern unvarnished discipline. At a large Council school seen in East London,

where the infants' department was four hundred strong, the visitor felt there was something to be said for this lapse into unregeneracy.

They were "mixed" infants, from the age of five upwards—one of them explained in answer to an inquiry that she "was six yesterday, but seven to-day"—and when the visitor saw them, they were scampering wildly, and apparently with no other motive than that of

emptying their lungs, all over the extensive playground. Nobody could have denied that they were "moving about freely." Then a bell rang and a teacher shouted a command.



Instantly, chaos became order, and within two minutes correctly sorted groups of boys and girls, in column formation, were marching in absolute silence to their several class-rooms. If this amazing result had been achieved by preaching the gospel of freedom to mixed infants, it was certainly justified by its fruits. But the visitor had her doubts.

No teacher could be blamed for resorting sometimes to the simpler paths of discipline.

Individual attention must remain more or less an unattainable ideal while classes of forty, fifty, and even sixty continue to exist; and enlightened pedagogy goes down under the weight of numbers, aggravated by the poverty of the children's homes and the lack of sufficient sleep and food from which most of them suffer. But the remarkable thing is that the visitor to the schools rarely finds the



teachers taking this pessimistic view. If you can prevail upon them to continue the lesson they were giving when you interrupted them, instead of thinking that you must want the children to sing or show off in some way, you do gain an impression of how education is carried on under difficulties.

A geography lesson to Standard IV, in a large mixed Council school, one day offered an opportunity of the kind. The children had been studying the rivers of Africa for

some moments in silence; then maps and textbooks were closed, and their teacher, a brisk young woman with bobbed hair who would have been mistaken for a schoolgirl ten years ago, asked questions rapidly, each time pointing first for an answer to some child who had not



put up an eager hand, then turning to one of the others, who knew the answer, to supply it to those who didn't. The defaulting scholar was usually given a second opportunity to answer the same question, and generally did so correctly. In addition to drumming facts into them, their

teacher held them all enthralled by a picturesque account of the country under discussion, describing the Victoria Falls, the customs of African tribes, and otherwise instructing the visitor very pleasantly.

Without the help of home work, which is rarely given in elementary schools, it must be almost impossible to make lasting impressions on the children; but if a scholar's mind is opened ever so

slightly to the conception of something that lies outside ordinary experience, he may be said to have been induced to take a first step towards



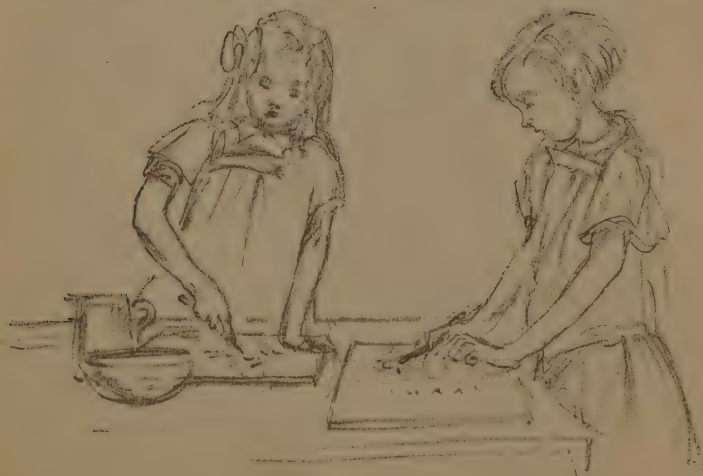
culture. Unfortunately, first steps cannot often be followed up in the case of children who hardly ever stay at school beyond the statutory age of fourteen. Economic need is so strong a factor in this matter that one has even heard of a mother who came to school to fetch her son away to his first job at midday on his fourteenth birthday, with the plea that he had been born, fourteen years before, at that hour in the morning !

This does not necessarily mean that the parents do not value education, when they can afford to do so. They are generally very proud if their child wins a free place in a secondary school, or is transferred to a Central School. There are several of these Central Schools under the London County Council, to which the children are sent who have reached a certain standard in the yearly



examination for which all elementary school children sit at the age of eleven, but for whom there are not enough free places provided in the secondary schools. An excellent secondary school education is given in the Central School, which is slightly vocational in character, and has either a commercial or an industrial bias.

The visitor did not find many snails creeping to the Central School for girls that she entered one day in South-West London, for every morning a large queue might have been seen there, waiting for the gates to open at 7 a.m. This did not betoken a frenzy for education, but merely a desire to play games before school



began. However, the same girls appeared as keen as young things can be expected to be, when they were seen later in beautifully equipped, modern class-rooms, studying history, botany, French, and so on, as well as drawing and music, and commercial subjects. In the kitchen, domestic science students did practical work in cooking the school dinner, while upstairs in a model flat others were learning to do housework with an efficiency that made one hope, though without feeling on very firm ground in the matter, that they would some day have as perfect a model home of their own to practise upon.

In this school the Head was one of those rare people—she would be the gem of an educational conference—who believe in the communal spirit as well as the rights of the individual. She gave her five hundred girls a school motto—“*Vouloir, c'est pouvoir*”—and divided them into five “houses” or groups, each composed of students of varying ages who competed in friendly rivalry, so that any girl who won a distinction, whether intellectual, artistic or athletic, felt she had won it for her house as well as her school, and only incidentally for herself.

The adoption of a school dress, now fairly common in Central Schools, helped to eliminate the class spirit that is based on difference of income.

At the same time, the individual was given her chance. One afternoon weekly, the school was arranged in subjects instead of classes, and every girl could choose her subject; another afternoon was reserved for some novelty, such as a French lecture, or a debate opened by an expert on the ballad, on decorative design, the latest scientific sensation, and so on. And always, especially in their fourth and fifth years—for Central scholars are urged to stay at school until the age of sixteen, although attendance is only compulsory up to fourteen—advice and special help were forthcoming for any girl in choosing and preparing for a career.



The inmates of this well-ordered establishment were not, however, less than human ; for the visitor overheard one small tomboy proclaim boldly, in defiance of the Head's weekly talks on personal hygiene: " I tell you I'm *not* going to wash any more to-day ! " Lessons in courtesy had apparently sunk a little deeper, since the following italicised exhortation appeared on one of the school notice boards: "*Please* will any girl who wishes to help in the gardening *please* sign this paper. Any night ; but every night there must be three girls. *Please* keep your night. If anything not clear, *please* ask H—— W——."



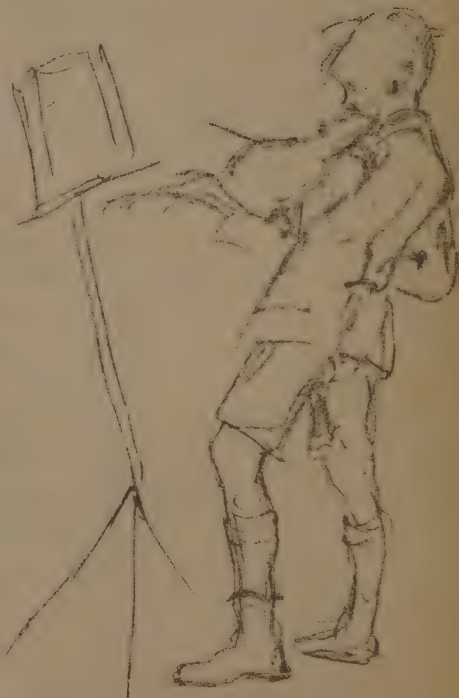
In poorer districts than Fulham the vocational bias would be industrial rather than commercial. The science side is accentuated in a boys' Central School at Bermondsey; and in one for girls at Limehouse dressmaking is admirably taught, and the Head encourages very beautiful fine needle-work, decorative designing and other branches of art and hand-work.



These Central Schools undoubtedly reveal much talent that must often remain undiscovered in boys and girls whose education begins and ends in the elementary schools, where little opportunity occurs for teaching extra subjects. They serve to remind us how many young Londoners have to begin to earn their living before they can possibly know what latent powers they possess. Probably no genius is stifled under the system, because genius

cannot be stifled. But a society does not stand or fall by the occasional emergence of a genius; and aggregate achievement must fall short of what it might be while the average child of the people is debarred, through the low school-leaving age, from fully developing his average powers.

Yet it cannot be denied that, in spite of its limitations, the elementary school does give to London children a glimpse of that more gracious world of the intellect and the spirit which is not always revealed to them in their daily life. They learn to sing and to dance, in many schools, becoming acquainted in this way with



good music, including their own English heritage of folk song and dance. They learn courtesy and the way to treat animals; they are given some opportunities of learning to draw and to design, to write creatively, even sometimes to play the violin and the piano, and to act plays. An admirable example of the work done by London elementary school teachers, not within the curriculum but purely for love, was seen a year or two ago in an education week that they organized in West Ham. All the elementary schools of the district took part in it; there were exhibitions of school work; there was an historic pageant, acted each day by a different school; and there were daily lectures for parents which seem to have emptied the local cinemas.

The visitor was chiefly attracted by the literary productions of these children, most of whom came from homes whose conditions could not be called conducive to imaginative work of any kind. The following lines, exhibited with a large number of poems and essays, were copied down at the time, as an example of the way imagination can work in the mind of a little

girl of twelve who has lived all her life in a London back street :—

Down a winding leafy lane,
Beneath a spreading oak,
There is the poet's corner,
The lonely poet's corner.

There in that lovely shady nook,
In a bed of bright green grass,
The music of the babbling brook
Is all the heart desires.

Oh! as I lay there in a dream,
The music of my heart
Burst from me in a gushing stream—
The world was nought.

Whitehall, of course, does not exactly inspire these cultural excursions ; but it does not stand in their way, though the official mind seems to incline rather towards vocational instruction, especially in the case of girls, for whom the teaching of mothercraft, for instance, is constantly being urged from headquarters. One would think that in any case vocational subjects might be ruled out of a school course that ends at the age of fourteen—about the age at which the children of higher Government officials would be going to public schools ; but this

seems to apply especially to the girls of the elementary schools, on whose playtime the vocational subjects recommended already encroach far too much. It seems to the outsider a curious perversion of educational theory to teach a little girl of the people how to wash and tend a wooden baby, in the few short hours of her day in which she gets a chance of cultivating intellect and imagination, when she will almost certainly have to wash and tend a real baby as soon as she gets home from school, and when maternity is going probably to occupy most of her life hereafter. Little boys, who are not required to learn fathercraft at school, are presumably left to conclude that a man has no more concern with family life than to bring home his wages regularly.

Fortunately, elementary school teachers are for the most part far better educationists than the school code requires them to be, just as love laughs at pedagogics and makes fathers better parents than education authorities think of teaching them to be. Occasionally, one encounters an old-fashioned headmaster or mistress, without imagination and with a reputation

for harshness and injustice—and it is not surprising that in the neighbourhood of their schools juvenile delinquency is often greatest—but such die-hards are now gradually becoming superannuated, and are being replaced generally by fine human men and women with young minds, who to their honour do far more for their young charges than merely teach them.

These elementary school teachers illumine the lives of London children. They know all their names and acquire a remarkable knowledge of their home circumstances; they have at least a nodding acquaintance with most of the parents; they can give a school character at any minute to an employer or a magistrate; they sacrifice their time and money to arrange treats for the children; they keep an eye on their health and try to get the requisitions of the school medical officer carried out; and they miraculously retain their enthusiasms and go to conferences and talk about educational ideals. All the while, with rare exceptions, they handle every child, even the least prepossessing young imp, very much as Izaak Walton handled the frog upon the hook, “as though they loved him.”

One can imagine the ironic mirth that would be aroused among young Londoners if they were presented with this picture of themselves in their relation to the person they call "teacher." But they will probably grow up all the happier for its being generally true.

CHAPTER IV

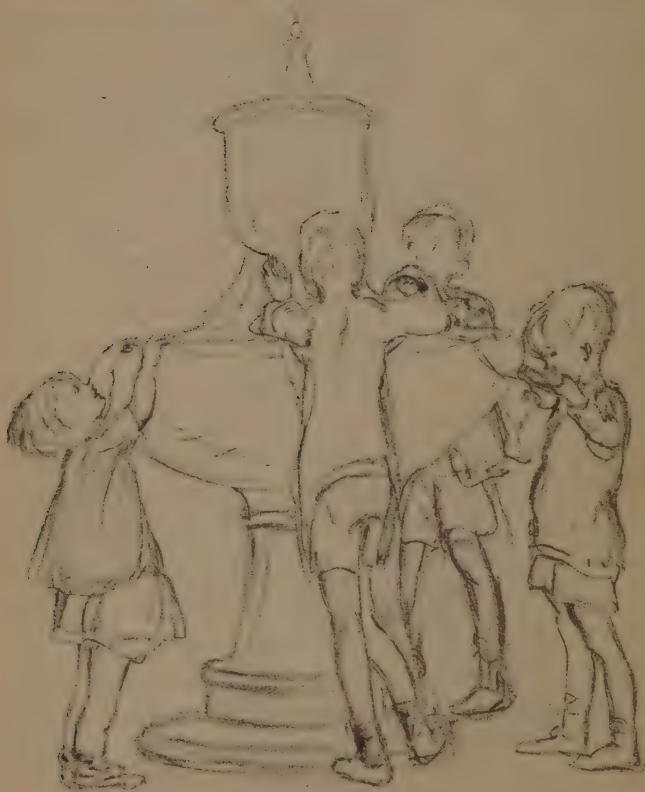
PLAYING

In the Street

THE benevolent reformer has revolutionised London childhood since the end of the nineteenth century ; but the eternal child persists in defiance of all change, and you find him in the raw as soon as you get east of Aldgate pump, or south and east of the Elephant, or west and north of Kensington Church. I encountered him unexpectedly in the Commercial Road, one spring day during an industrial upheaval. Dockers on strike thronged the pavement and poured over into the road ; police and civilians jostled one another indiscriminately ; now and then, mounted constables rode on to the footway and dispersed the people to right and left, only to find them forming up again more solidly than before, after the manner of any London crowd as soon as the immediate danger has passed over it.

A less promising spot for a playground could hardly be imagined. Yet right through the heart of the restless, uneasy multitude, avoiding with dexterity the legs of men and horses alike, a child came riding his scooter as unconcernedly as if he were a winged Pegasus—or merely a mortal boy in a country lane. It was a delightful instance of the seriousness of childhood persisting in the face of an unusual display of grown-up foolishness. But it was also very characteristic of the cockney spirit; for the child with the scooter could never have been found in a country lane. Almost within sight of him there was Shadwell Park, reclaimed from a swamp in a King's memory, all beautifully laid out with tennis courts and flower-beds, and intersected with tidy paths along which a scooter could be ridden at ease and without inconvenience to anybody. But, of course, to any London child—not necessarily born east of Aldgate pump—it is infinitely more amusing to manœuvre a course through a menacing crowd that is being charged by the police, than to scoot tamely and safely along a gravel path, with a view between iron railings of sacred grass plots and neat flower-beds.

The tidy park does not strike a note of adventure in the mind of the East End child. A teacher in a Council School suggested to her kindergarten class, one day, that they should



pretend to be in a grassy field. At once, the children ran from the centre of the room and stood in rows against the four walls. She was new to London and felt frankly perplexed.

“Don’t you know what grass is?” she asked.

The answer came in five-and-thirty shrill voices. “Yes, teacher! What you have to keep off of!”

The street is the cradle of the new-born babe, and the nursery of the toddler, and the playing-field of the elementary school child; and running wild in it is responsible for much of the vitality and the wit and the insatiable curiosity that are found animating every grown-up London crowd, whether it gathers to look at a street accident or a Royal procession. To be convinced of this, one has only to pass down a comparatively deserted road when the fire engine goes by.

I remember once walking along the edge of a cliff in Ireland when somebody fired a gun. Instantly the air became filled with a maze of darting sea birds and the whirr of wings. I am always reminded of that experience when the sound of the fire-bell brings a rush of shrieking little Londoners from all the back streets of a

neighbourhood ; and it helps one to understand that, great as are the charms of organized play hours, or of unorganized games in parks and open spaces, they fade before the glory of that rapturous dash for the end of the street when the fire engine goes by.

The sight of a crowded street in Bethnal Green or Whitechapel, on a fine summer's evening, might shock some visitors from a more refined and less populous London area, and would almost certainly repel, with its sounds and its odours, a stranger from the country. But beneath all its unsightliness and its squalor, the East London street often reveals a joy in living that is missed in other parts of the town, where there is no need for people to stay out on the doorstep until sleep drives them back into evil-smelling, verminous and stifling rooms that in hot weather turn night into a tormenting horror.

There is no doubt about the counter-attractions of the street under such circumstances. Nor is it difficult, apart from circumstances, to understand the fascination of dancing madly round the barrel organ, which seems to come there mainly for love of the little revellers, for

few pennies fall to the lot of the organ-grinder in such a street. The ice-cream man gets what halfpence can be extracted from indulgent parents on a night of this kind ; and the lucky few who are able to patronise him enjoy a temporary popularity that is generally richly deserved, for where there is nothing, there is always prodigal generosity. A little chap, sharing an apple with his companions by the simple method of handing it to each in turn for a bite, contentedly accepting the core for his



own share when it has gone the round of them all, is typical of something that is always thrown up by poverty and want.

Cricket that is played in the street under these obstructive conditions is, I admit, not cricket; but few will deny that it is magnificent. The lamp-post might seem to be the obvious wicket; but, as a matter of fact, it is nearly always rejected by the experienced street cricketer because it brings the opposite windows into too risky a range. By marking out a pitch length-ways instead of across the street, one plays for safety whether one can be said to be playing cricket or not. With somebody's coat rolled up for a wicket, with any apology for ball and bat, with a resourceful captain who knows how to place his field rapidly every time it is dispersed by the



traffic, and can carry on repartee at the same time with an exasperated driver—with plenty of interruptions, in short, and the chance of being called off at any moment to hold the baby or to fetch something from the oil shop, street cricket becomes one of the things that have made London children what they are. Indeed, I often feel when I come across new systems of education, devised to develop the initiative of the child, that these are really rather wasted on the young Londoner of the back streets. Street cricket is worth any one of them.

To realise what a power of concentration can achieve, it is only necessary to visit one of these London back streets after school hours, where little girls swing interminably round lamp-posts in the midst of the clamour, winding and unwinding themselves with monotonous regularity; where chalk courses are marked out on the crowded pavement by players who hop skilfully after a pebble that journeys erratically from “Home” to “Russia,” or “Heaven,” or “*Enfer*,” the destination varying according to temperament and nationality; where the one-

legged roller-skater, never knowing the joy of possessing a whole pair of skates, rushes helter-skelter up and down the middle of the road, always on the verge of a collision but always just avoiding one; and where some graceful child, apart and absorbed, finds a corner in which to skip long and skilfully, droning out loud to herself a ditty of which the refrain seems to run—

Al-bert, Albert !

Dont-cher love me ?

Yuss, no ! Yuss, no !

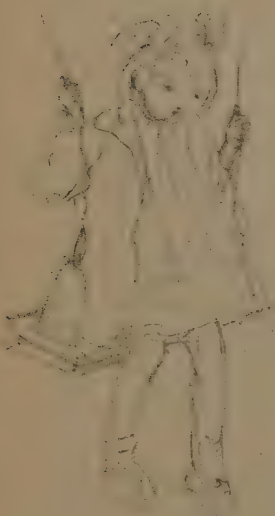
dating back, perhaps, to Queen Victoria's marriage, or maybe to some prehistoric period—or perhaps, after all, only to last week, when “ Albert ” was somebody's “ boy.”

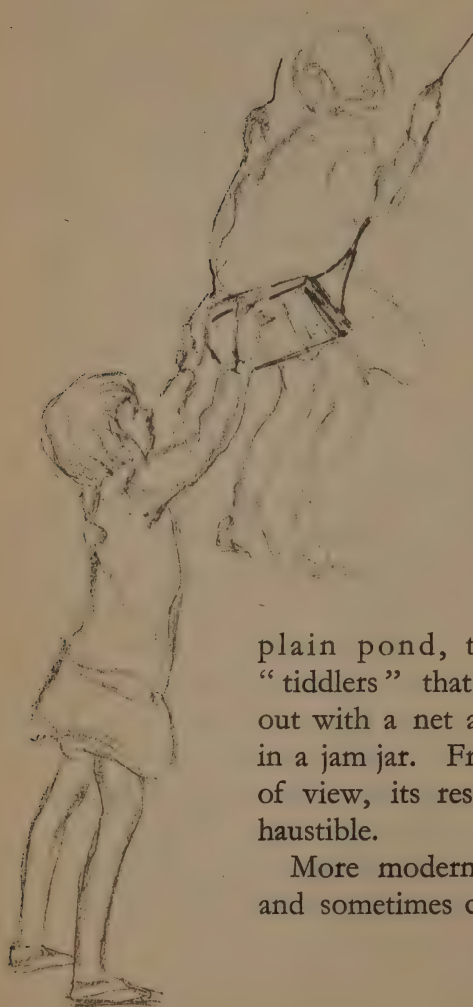
Park and Playground

But the London child never runs in a rut. The devious course of the roller-skater is symbolic of that readiness to try something fresh which will make a group of girls and boys suddenly detach themselves from the crowd in

the street and go off to play in the park instead. For, in spite of the cynicism of the kindergarten babies, a good deal of genuine grass is open to the people's children in any district where there is a public park of reasonable dimensions. And in the park are many delights that help to while away the hours devoted to looking after the baby.

Street cricket has its counterpart in park cricket, though here the pitches are sometimes so close together that it requires both honesty and discrimination to field one ball more than another. You can picnic in the park, too, eating out of paper bags that emerge from the perambulator long before the sun in the heavens strikes the hour of dinner or tea. And if there is any kind of a pond, the sun will probably set before you remember that father is at home by this time and





waiting for you. It is hard to say whether it is more entrancing to pretend that the pond in the park is a limitless ocean on which to sail strange home-made craft never seen on any other sea, or merely to treat it as a plain pond, teeming with "tiddlers" that can be fished out with a net and put to gasp in a jam jar. From either point of view, its resources are inexhaustible.

More modern than the park, and sometimes contained within

it, are the playgrounds laid out by some public authority, where all kinds of thrills are supplied, from swings and see-saws to the giant-stride and the sand-pit. The greatest of them all is undoubtedly the sand-pit. I always think that the man or woman who first conceived that idea of bringing the seaside to town deserves the immortality that is not often supposed to fall to the lot of those who build on this shifting foundation. It was one of the great thoughts that anybody might have had and didn't; and that is the real test of a great thought.

Wherever a patch of sand has been deposited for the purpose, you will find it covered with small diggers, digging as if for their lives. In Poplar or in Kensington, in an oasis among docks or under the shelter of a King's palace, these absorbed young builders may be found digging and heaping up and pulling down again, while all around them boys and girls swing and whirl towards the sky, clinging to rings and ropes, rending the air with shrieks of joy and that simulated terror which is the very ecstasy of joy.

One of the most enchanting of these municipally blessed playgrounds is hidden away in a

flowery corner of Bermondsey, at one end of a garden that serves as a nursery for flowers and trees to be afterwards planted out in streets and open spaces. In Bermondsey there is a "Beautification Committee" on the local Council; and once—I really believe it was not a dream, though I never found it again!—I came upon a police station there which had flowers in its front garden, just like a wood-cutter's cottage in a fairy tale. So there is nothing inappropriate in the presence of a joy-slide in a Bermondsey garden that is also a nursery.

A joy-slide is a perfectly lovely invention. At the bottom, the joy-slider picks up a mat, then mounts a spiral staircase to the top end of the slide, at which point, egged on from behind and urged to "git on wiv it!" he plops himself hurriedly on his mat and hurtles at a breathless speed to the bottom before he has time to think. If he is misguided enough to think he has time to think, the next joy-slider lands on top of him and the attendant passes remarks. Evidently, one of the more subtle attractions of the joy-slide is the possibility it offers of finding variants of its simple purpose,



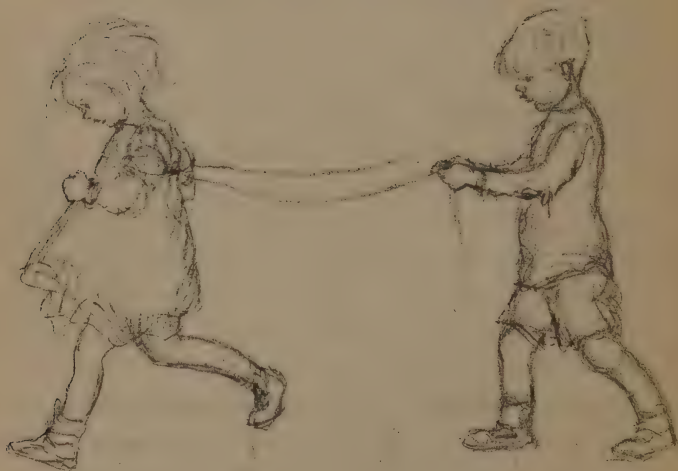
THE PLAYGROUND IN THE PARK

the wicked nature of which may be gathered from some of the rules printed on the board attached to the slide.

“No child should use the slide for more than fifteen minutes,” runs one prohibition—a somewhat perplexing one, for in the “rush hours” of the joy-slide fifteen uninterrupted seconds would be almost as difficult to secure as fifteen minutes, and in school hours it stands deserted anyhow. Another rule states that “no two children should use it jointly, except by mutual consent, and then subject to the control of the attendant”; while a third solemnly prohibits any attitude on the slide but that of “a normal sitting posture.” These rules call up a lurid picture of the attendant—such a kind, mild-looking attendant, too!—engaged in grappling with two boys of Bermondsey who insist, without “mutual consent,” on shooting head-first and simultaneously down the joy-slide; but perhaps the rules overstate their case from excessive caution. Certainly, no visitor, watching the exploits of the happy crowds that visit this flowery playground daily, can suppose that they are much troubled by rules. One would like

to think that they do not always play quite unaccompanied, and that sometimes the benevolent stranger who presented this toy anonymously, for "the use and enjoyment of the little children of Bermondsey," comes sliding among them as the "Unseen Playmate" of Stevenson's poem might have done :—

Nobody heard him and nobody saw,
His is a picture you never could draw ;
But he's sure to be present, abroad or at home,
When children are happy and playing alone.



The Play Hour

I believe Mrs. Humphry Ward first took up with enthusiasm the idea of the play hour, in the 'nineties, and there are few London districts to-day in which it is not possible for children of school age to attend one every week. It might be supposed that the comparative restraint of playing organized games within four walls, learning to dance and sing and so on, would contrast so unfavourably with the freedom and lawlessness of the street that the play hour would never become really popular. But that is to misconstrue the whole nature of the London child, who is always ready to jump at a new experience, and always capable of extracting a thrill even from the most unpromising material. Your young rebel may feel the control of the play hour a little irksome, but you will find him coming back again next week. He will get something out of it from his own point of view, though he may sometimes appear to be a failure, from yours.

At a working girls' club in Kennington, where little girls from various schools came daily for one of these play hours, the event was so popular that attempts were constantly made by the children to gain admittance on the wrong day. Their guileless plot was always foiled, for the doorkeeper, who had a miraculous memory for faces, never failed to recognize them and send them off in disgrace; but, not discouraged by hope deferred, Wednesday children would continue to try to pass themselves off as Thursday children, and so on, week after week, hope eternal always springing afresh in hearts that were never made sick.

Other ways of showing appreciation of the play hour are sometimes less ingenuous. I remember being left in charge, at a settlement in Hoxton, of a wild band of youngsters, new to the softening influences of the play hour, who took the opportunity afforded by my own inexperience and the unavoidable absence of the heads of the establishment, to switch off the electric light at the main and turn on all the taps that they could find and I couldn't. That was my darkest play hour, but not theirs; for

although chaos reigned for a period, they were sporting enough to recognize a point at which it ceased to be funny ; and they helped me quite amiably to mop up the swamp when light was at last thrown upon the situation. But when the Warden afterwards referred to the incident as my baptism of fire, I felt that he might have phrased his reference to the elements more tactfully. I have certainly thought ever since that it would be better to go through fire than through water for any cause, if choice were possible.

But that was a long time ago. In these more sophisticated days, the play hour has quite often its gentler moments. At the Children's House in Bow, for instance, I actually found boys and girls of ten and eleven spending part of theirs in writing letters to thank people for Christmas presents, although this literary occupation by no means ensured a quiet life to the grown-up helper. At this particular settlement, great stress is laid, and with considerable effect, upon the advantages of self-discipline as against discipline imposed from above ; and one result of this admirable system is to place the grown-up person

—any grown-up person as I found!—entirely at the disposal of the small person who is in process of being thus educated. Still, only a very stuffy grown-up visitor, I should think, would object to being suddenly grasped by the ankle (as this visitor was) and asked by a little imp of a girl, stretched face downwards on the floor, “Here! How d’yer spell ‘plaid’?” Or even to her subsequent criticism, “Sure that’s right? It don’t look it!” It doesn’t look it, of course; that is the peculiarity of spelling. But I think only children who are in process of learning self-discipline would feel free to say so quite as frankly.

One of the small frequenters of this play hour had scornfully rejected his Christmas present as being “only a library book,” and had promptly taken his revenge on society by helping himself to some toys belonging to the House. Pilfering—“nicking,” we call it in the East End—that most universal of the venial sins of childhood, and still more of adolescence, is always taxing the resources of those who have to deal with children in London, where opportunities for taking what belongs to



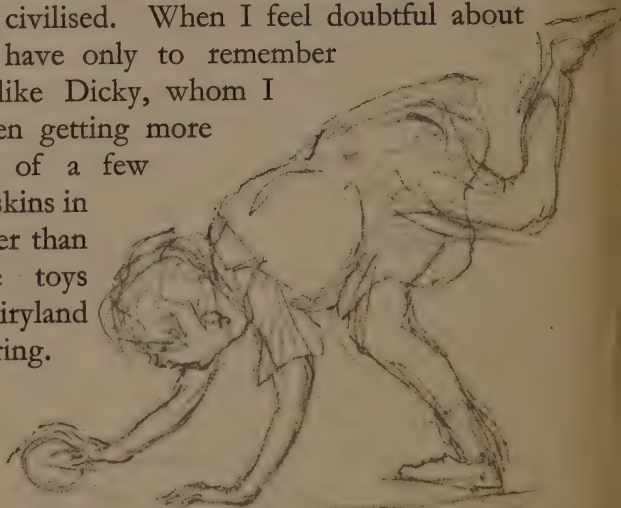
A SUMMER EVENING IN EAST LONDON

somebody else are many and tempting. It may be dealt with in various ways. At the Hoxton settlement, people used to look the other way—as well they might!—when the play-hour children stole dog biscuits to appease their hunger. In the Children's House, another and more roundabout method was adopted with the small thief in question, who, by the way, had an unpromising family history as regards this class of crime. He was talked to as an equal who might possibly have a different point of view on the subject, and he was given the suggestion that it would be a good thing to stay away from the settlement for a week, in order to think over the ethical aspects of it—a procedure that appealed to him, as it turned out, and was attended by fairly good results.

The London of to-day teems with practical schemes for adding to the healthy amusements of children. There is a gulf as wide between their playtime and that of the children of last century, as there is between the modern life of a schoolgirl in the West End and that once led by the demure young ladies who are now her grandmothers and her great-aunts.

No child in any part of London would wish to go back to those older days when playtime was not much more interesting than lesson-time. One's only concern is lest the newer freedom should bring with it fresh restrictions of the spirit, and the attractions of organized play destroy the power to retire into the solitudes of the mind where neither squalor nor sordidness can intrude.

But there is no need to worry. The London child will be the last barbarian in the world to become civilised. When I feel doubtful about this, I have only to remember people like Dicky, whom I have seen getting more joy out of a few banana skins in the gutter than all the toys from Fairyland could bring.



Dick

Dick sat on the edge of the kerbstone, drumming his feet in the gutter.

He was very dirty, partly because it was a school holiday and washing was not an absolute necessity as on other days ; but principally because his mother's finances, father being again out of work, had once more reached the point at which a choice has to be made between buying food and buying soap. By no stretch of imagination could it be supposed that Dick's mother had on this occasion made the mistake of choosing soap.

It was summertime, and the school holiday afforded an opening for economy in shoe leather as well as soap ; so Dick's bare feet explored a dry and dusty gutter, littered with banana skins, egg shells and potato parings, decaying evidence of food with which he had at best only a sketchy acquaintance, meal time in Dick's home being an observance that depended upon the doubtful presence of a real meal. If Dick

had been a cynic, he might have wondered how it was that in wealthier quarters of the town, where the houses are always stocked with potatoes, eggs and bananas, the gutters show no evidence of their presence.

But Dicky was no cynic, or at least not more consciously so than most children are. His stomach might be empty, but the novelty of this circumstance having worn off long ago, if it ever was a novelty, he certainly was not wondering, as he sat crouched against the lamp-post, why banana skins were usually empty when he encountered them. A full banana skin, in the gutter, would have been a miracle; it did not even occur to him to imagine such a thing. But empty banana skins could be anything he chose to make them, from a fleet of ships to an unfathomable forest. For although Dicky's feet were in the gutter, his head, like any other dreamer's, was in the clouds.

His eyes strayed away from the busy thoroughfare, and up the line of the lamp-post to the murky sky beyond, and then back to the gutter. The traffic with hoot and rattle and rumble, went ceaselessly by. It would be grand, thought

Dick, to leave go of the lamp-post and float along with the stream, not just for a little way, a precarious traveller on the tail-end of a lorry—any kid could do that!—but on and on, and round the world, quite seven times round the world, he decided, and then, perhaps, back again—just to show every one what a fine fellow he was!

He put his head down so that it almost touched the refuse of banana skins, and he squinted along the edge of the kerb and saw another street waiting for him—a great silent road that wandered off into a world lit by stars, where there were wide plains and rushing rivers, and forests full of raging wild beasts (of which he was not in the least afraid), and mountains he could climb, and lots and lots of sea and ships. “And me riding along it on



a white horse wiv wings—no, not a horse! A motor boat wiv wings, so as I could fly up out of the water and bash the sky wiv my blinking foot!” gasped Dicky under his breath.

His excitement getting the better of him, he sat up and shied a banana skin with deadly aim at a passing motor omnibus. The blank and imbecile countenance he immediately presented to the searching gaze of the conductor did not convey to that official any impression of poetic inspiration.

A roaming musician on the pavement behind set up a dreadful shriek on a tin whistle, that no traffic could overcome; and as he strolled off along the road that, all unbeknown to him, went seven times round the world, the boy who sat in the gutter shrugged his shoulders grandly. “If it was me,” he boasted to the roaring wild beasts in the forest, “I would draw music from my pipe that would make all the people in the world come after me, millions and millions and *millions* of ’em, whether they would or no. If it was me. . . .”

His voice trailed off into an ecstatic “Ah-h!” as he pounced on a banana skin in which his

eye, recalled momentarily from forest and stars, had detected a minute portion of fruit.

Two people turned at the lamp-post to cross over the road.

“How dangerous!” remarked the girl; and she did the obvious thing and kicked the little pile of banana skins into the gutter with the point of her patent leather shoe. Her companion stumbled against the still figure of the child who had piled them in a heap.

“Hello, sonny! Better get out of that,” he advised, and lifted Dicky on to his feet. “Might get run over, you know.”

“Poor little scrap!” cried the girl, searching her dispatch-case for the remains of an office lunch. “Are you hungry, child?”

Dicky, looking as vague as a poet might who had just been unhitched from his star, decided that hers was one of the totally foolish questions, common to elegant ladies who wore shiny black shoes, that one was not expected to answer. At the same time, he gave to the paper bag she dropped in his hands all the stern practical attention that is due to things that really matter. His voracity made his benefactors smile.

"Lucky little animal to be satisfied with a lump of cake!" observed the young man extravagantly, as he guided his companion across the street—the dirty, untidy one, of course, not the broad silent road that led to sea and ships.

"Yes, indeed! How lovely to be poor!" exclaimed the girl, playing up to him. "I mean to say, if you're poor, all your wants are just material, and—and all that, aren't they? Now, you and I"

"Yes," said the young man, understanding perfectly. "You and I"

Their voices died away into the hoot and rattle and rumble of the only street they saw. Dicky, too, munching his cake, had lost sight of the road that went seven times round the world. After all, nobody can do more than one thing at a time really well.

CHAPTER V

BEING ENTERTAINED

The Pictures

FROM time to time attempts are made by well-meaning people to impose a censorship on the amusements of children, especially on those that are open to the children of the poor. Yesterday, it was the penny dreadful that was supposed to fill the police courts with juvenile criminals ; to-day, it is the cinema that is singled out for attack ; and to-morrow it will be some other entertainment that the incorrigible little pleasure-seekers insist upon enjoying too well rather than wisely. These attempts never succeed. Nevertheless, they continue to be made ; and perhaps there is something to be said for them if we ignore the special circumstances of the children for whom the censorship is proposed. Obviously, many of the entertainments that stand open to any London child who can scrape up the price of admission deal with subjects that ought to be outside the

experience of childhood. It is because they are not outside the experience of childhood in darker London that the case against them seems to fall to the ground.

A woman who had something to do with the children of a very poor London district was criticised, one day, for allowing one of them to sing an immoral song in her presence. "But most of these children live in immoral surroundings," she explained; "and if I were to begin censoring their songs, I should probably put things into their heads that haven't yet occurred to them. As it is, they freely discuss these things with me, which seems to me much safer."

Hers may have been an exceptional experience; for, in spite of every apparent incentive, the majority of poor homes do contrive to escape some of the worst consequences of bad housing and overcrowding, just as most children, if their attention is not drawn to them, will miraculously evade many of the evil influences that surround them. They will even drop the careless habit of using bad language as easily as they acquired it, unless some tactless elder



THE CINEMA QUEUE

makes it seem to them an amusing game to see how much of it he or she will stand.

“What have you done this morning, dear?” asked a married teacher of her carefully brought up little girl, who had gone that day for the first time to the elementary school.

“It was lovely, mummy!” was the ecstatic reply. “We played football in the playground, and we kicked the bloody ball right froo the bloody gate!” Just in time, the disconcerted mother refrained from comment; and her little daughter, as it happened, never used the word again.

But it is undeniable that many of the girls and boys, who stand chattering in the queue outside a London picture house, are better acquainted with the seamy side of life than some of the grown-up people who live in other parts of the town. One’s feeling about it is that if their natural innocence does not accompany them inside the cinema, because their minds have been corrupted before they get there, it is too late to begin to worry about censoring a few films. One can only hope that either they are too unconscious to detect evil, both

inside and outside the picture house, or too familiar with evil to attach significance to it.

In any case, the reformer who believes in censorship for children is asking for trouble. Where, in fact, is the line to be drawn? The most familiar nursery rhyme, approached from this point of view, will appear a sink of iniquity. It is questionable, for instance, whether the receptive mind of an impressionable child should be allowed to come in contact with the horrid deeds of Little Tommy Thin, and of the farmer's wife who mutilated blind mice; or to make the acquaintance of Peter Piper and that outrageous fellow Taffy the Welshman. The truth would seem to be that the world itself requires quite a lot of censoring before it can be made fit for children to come into it; and the grown-up censor might be just as well occupied in that direction as in bowdlerising entertainments that rather too



crudely hold the mirror up to life as it ought not to be, but unfortunately is.

There is some solace in the reflection that the latter-day censor himself has not grown up a murderer, a thief, and a wife-beater through having thoroughly enjoyed Punch and Judy in his sheltered Victorian childhood; so perhaps there is also hope of salvation for the shameless youngsters who can be relied upon at any time

to fill a large picture house to overflowing, in order to exult over the shocking misdeeds of Charlie Chaplin's "Kid"—that creation of a London genius who, with the exception of Charles Dickens, probably knows more about the city child of the by-street than any genius who ever lived. Naughtiness makes a perennial appeal that no censor can destroy; and really, when one looks—if one does look—at many of the plays and films that are popular



with grown-up people, one feels that children are at least as well qualified as they are to choose their own entertainments.

An early attempt at supervision, made a few years ago in the appointment of a Commission to consider cinema production generally, should have demonstrated the uselessness of censorship. This Commission recommended that pictures intended for children should be "exhilarating without leading to undue mental strain." That sounds charmingly simple, but is not at all simple to carry out ; for while children possibly find most of the films they see "exhilarating," I am not sure that, unless they know the American language really well, considerable mental strain would not be involved in translating the captions that accompany them. It is true that the words thus flashed upon the screen appear to be English words ; but no knowledge of English will interpret some of the sentences they make until the picture in question has followed the verbal description. This procedure may be a very good exercise in the modern way of learning a new language, but it certainly does not carry out the recommendation of the Commission,

that pictures for children should be "exhilarating without involving mental strain."

The enrichment of the child's vocabulary is not wholly to be despised, however; and it is decidedly enriched by the caption, "Potential vamp sells hot dogs," though it requires some familiarity with the cinema to understand this without the aid of a picture showing a budding adventuress in the act of dispensing hot sausages in a cheap restaurant. And, in spite of the risk of mental strain, it may be a good thing to learn that the hero of a Wild West drama is called "an inoffensive nester." What, it may be asked, is an "inoffensive nester," or for that matter, an "offensive nester"? Nothing to do with a cuckoo, the enthusiast for nature films should be instantly assured; for a "nester," in the jargon of the Wild West, appears to be a settler, and an inoffensive one is a rare phenomenon who does not want to shoot everybody at sight, and is only introduced into a film of this sort, one gathers, for purposes of derision. Here, however, one may be mistaken; for film American, like a French translation of the Scriptures, has the curious effect upon the British

reader of making the most serious statement sound like a joke. "They revelled till the sun came up for air" is not a humorous phrase, for example, but a mere statement of fact; so is this description by a high-spirited "vamp" of New York, "This city is dead from the waist upwards and never had any legs," though what the New York of the films would be like if it was alive instead of dead from the waist upwards defies imagination. Even when the virtuous heroine prays on her knees, "Oh, help me to be a strong-jawed jane," her "close-up" promptly disposes of any hope one may entertain that she is trying to be funny.

Being an extraordinarily adaptable little creature, the child at the cinema is probably by this time able to interpret at sight, and without any strain of any kind, the unreal language that is affected by the unreal people who populate the land of the film. The mental strain is more likely to be passed on to the school teacher, next time a member of her literature class refers to a famous character in "Hamlet" as the "graveyard janitor." But as a matter of fact, the London child does not

know the meaning of mental strain. He is always ready for anything, anywhere, at any time; and in the picture house he will drink in romance and "comics" and instruction with equal avidity, so long as it is good of its kind. Children do not like immoral stories because they are immoral, but because they are good stories; and similarly, they do not find the life-story of a microbe dull unless it is dull. This always surprises me, because if I had paid my sixpence for a red velvet seat in order to see a glorious medley of cowboys, buffaloes and nesters (offensive and inoffensive), and were then confronted with the history of a loaf of bread, I should want my money back.

Cockney children, with their inexhaustible love of something new, are not like that. They will rise in their seats and cheer even the science lecturer—if he is a good lecturer. Yet you would think that he properly belongs to that class of kill-joy persons, who, when they are women, are described in the caption of the American film as "vestal virgins of the uplift."

The Panto

The very superior person, who likes to think that the natural taste of the undeveloped mind is always good, should avoid taking children to what is called in some circles the "panto"; for this pleasant theory breaks down instantly before their rude delight in the knockabout business of vulgar comedians, generally dressed as ugly old women; in such jokes as the complaint of one of the comedians (the hero's mother, maybe) that the gentleman lodger does not love her, or the complaint of the gentleman lodger (the second comedian) that kissing her is like taking a dose of castor-oil; in the variety artist's excruciating pun, when the egg in the egg trick disappears under the flag—that "the Union Jack knows no yoke"; even in the temporary abstraction of the jolly pirate, when he drops his cutlass and tells the audience across the footlights in his best tenor voice, that "She's immense; there never was a girl like my Hortense"; and above all, in the stampede

of every comedian to the wings when a finger-post comes up through the trap-door, labelled "Free Beer," and points in that direction.

Some of us would like to believe that nice little boys and girls find this sort of thing tedious, even if they do not find it low; but we should have to frequent a fool's paradise as well as the "panto" in order to believe it. Nor can we explain away the phenomenon learnedly, as a remnant of that primitive delight in broad humour which is shown in the simple buffoonery of Mother Earth and Father Sun, in the oldest drama in existence. We cannot even attribute it to the children's determination to like everything unreservedly when they go to the pantomime; for they are often extremely critical of some aspects of it. All this applies equally to children from all parts of London; for, as one who has accompanied young Londoners of many kinds to this yearly hotch-potch of fairy story and politics and music-hall jokes, the present writer can say positively that very little class distinction is discernible in their genuine enjoyment of its low comedy, or in their stern disapproval of certain recurring defects in its production.

"Why does the Prince higher his voice like a girl?" sighed a small pantomime-goer on one of these annual excursions. "I thought he said he was tired and must e'en take a rest. I wish he *would* take a rest!" The Prince, of course, "highered" his voice like a girl because he *was* a girl—a pantomime peculiarity that is a perennial source of disillusionment to everybody under twelve in the audience. It is, indeed, a curious feature of this class of production that in it we invariably drop the old tag "Boys will be boys" just when for once it would be really appropriate.

The resentful bewilderment of a group of children in the audience was intense at one pantomime, when Robinson Crusoe made his appearance in pale blue silk tights and a chiffon jumper, and, breaking into song in a high soprano voice, told the Princess (listening abstractedly while she



dabbed at her waved and shingled head) for several verses on end that, when away at sea, he would be “waiting, waiting for you!”—a prediction that was never fulfilled, for the persistent young woman did not keep him waiting a minute, but followed him (and the lime-light) to the most densely peopled desert island that even a seasoned pantomime-goer like myself had ever seen.

The child at the pantomime could perhaps pardon a more fairylike hero, like Aladdin or Prince Charming, for wearing chiffon draperies while he rubs lamps or hunts glass slippers; but no Robinson Crusoe could look like that and fight whole bands of cannibals single-handed, assuring Friday grandly at the end—

You mean you'll be my slave? That can never be!
No Englishman owns slaves—they all are free,
So you'll be my servant;—now, no thanks!
You must obey me and play no pranks.

Some parts of the pantomime, while not actively disliked by most children, are passed over as negligible, just as the dull parts of a book are skipped. References to current events generally leave them quite cold. The good fairy holds their attention while she makes a

perfunctory allusion in rhymed couplets to the plot; but it wanders when she subsides into fluent prose and talks about foreign politics and a strong Navy. Nearly every one in a pantomime talks sooner or later about foreign politics and the Navy; and this puzzles the child who is watching out for a fairy story, for although it is quite possible for a war scare to be a fairy story, a fairy story, faithfully followed, would never be a war scare. Besides, children from poorer London naturally suppose they are at the pantomime to be entertained and not to attend an open-air meeting, which, although quite a good entertainment in its way (especially if the speaker cannot get a hearing), they can attend almost any day in the week for nothing. So they yawn widely over Friday's prophecy that, in days to come, "when Republics everywhere are quite the thing, England will still have her true British King"; and over the good fairy's announcement in the transformation scene that "Good has triumphed over ill, and England is old England still," an assertion that no one could deny after sitting through four or five hours of pantomime.

The defects of pantomime do not seriously interfere with appreciation of it by children who come from back streets. At the same time, they are thorough-going little purists during the brief periods when the plot of the original story holds the stage. "That isn't a fairy! That's only a lady!" cried a shrill voice during a performance of Cinderella. Asked why she thought this, the child stared in astonishment at such ignorance. "Fairies don't have black hair—not them!" she said contemptuously. "Good fairies oughter have golden hair an' blew eyes!"

This having been meekly conceded, the revolt spread. "And jest look at her clothes," scoffed another voice. "*Clothes!* My word!" A foolish conductor of pantomime parties, who should have known better, asked what the derided fairy godmother ought to be wearing. The answer to that came in a chorus. "Spangles, o' course! And *wings!*"

This loyalty to tradition may partly explain why children, quite uneducated in opera, will sit rapt through the three acts of "Hansel and Gretel." They thoroughly approve of the witch

who looks and speaks like a witch—the only case of a woman's impersonation by a man that really comes off well—and of the Early Victorian angels with long flowing draperies and massive feather wings, who sing and behave exactly as children with a respect for tradition would expect them to sing and behave. Of course, part of this approval may be simulated, for children can be dreadfully polite when being entertained. But I believe they are not polite about “Hansel and Gretel” as a rule, and that they bear with the duller passages for the sake of its eminently satisfactory moments, such as that in which the wronged little hero and heroine turn the tables on the witch and push her into the oven she has prepared for them. This episode always sends a spontaneous shout of unalloyed glee to heaven from hundreds of youthful spectators, who seem to express in it that natural resentment against injustice which the happiest childhood cannot prevent us from acquiring early in life.

It is safe to take children to Humperdinck's fairy opera, because he presents a familiar tale and keeps to the letter of it. But it is also

safe to take them to the pantomime, though the pantomime never keeps to the story and its fairies dress like ladies instead of wearing only spangles and wings. This is one of the disconcerting truths that makes it impossible for the psychologist to lay down laws for children.

“What did you like best?” asked a very rash aunt of the young niece she had taken to a production of Cinderella in the Christmas holidays. Of course, the aunt was thinking of the coach and the glass slippers and the dear little mice. But the young niece wasn’t.

“I liked it best where Cinderella’s ugly sister said she escaped in the gas-pipe, and the funny man said he went to meter,” she answered without hesitation.

“But why?” asked the aunt faintly. “What did it mean?”

“I don’t know what it meant,” was the reply. “But it was funny.”

It is no use trying to get inside a child’s mind. It is no use lamenting that pantomimes and cinemas are full of jokes that children ought not to like, but do. Consolation must rather

be sought in the fact that, with all their faults, these entertainments cast a gleam of colour and magic into the grey surroundings of the London child, and make him look for something more in pumpkins than pumpkin pie, and set him rubbing old lamps to see if he can summon a geni. He does not really think he will get a glass coach or a fairy palace out of it; but these excursions of the mind, giving him a glimpse of new worlds to conquer and keeping him always on the look-out for the adventure that may be lurking round the next corner, do make him a delightful creature to entertain whenever fortune enables us to be his host for an hour or two. The poor artist found this, the night she entertained Billy and young Flo.

Billy and Young Flo

A cold wind swept down the street and whistled past the artistic restaurant with the blue glass ball in the window. It was hungry weather, especially if you had started the day

without any breakfast and followed up this blank opening with a dinner of bread and margarine, because it was Friday when the family exchequer is naturally at its lowest. So there was more reason for hanging round the entrance to the Blue Ball after dark than just the novelty of its presence in a drab unswept street of Central London, where you would expect to find only the kind of cheap eating-house that has a ham instead of a blue glass ball in the window. The novelty of the artistic restaurant had, indeed, begun to wear off in the neighbourhood. But the joy of waiting in the street outside for the door to open never palled; for a puff of warm air came out and enveloped you pleasantly, and when the door closed again, you could amuse yourself by analysing the component parts of the appetising smell that had momentarily assailed your nostrils.

“Pork an’ greens, Billy,” hazarded one of the two children who were beguiling the time in this engaging occupation.

“Wrong again, fathead,” returned her brother. “It’s turtle an’ oysters.”

"But I like pork an' greens best," protested the little girl, for whom the old adventures were quite good enough.

"Well, you can't always have what you like, young Flo," was the painfully accurate retort. "Toffs like them in there live on turtle and——"

"Then I won't never be a toff," decided young Flo. "Oh, Bill! Isn't it jest like Aladdin's palace? I could stay here, lookin' in, for ever an' ever an' ever!"

"My dear children!" remonstrated one of the emerging toffs when she nearly fell over them.

Encouraged by her smile, which contained no rebuke in it, they decided to submit the point at issue to friendly arbitration.

"Please, miss, wotcher been eating in there? Was it turtle an' oysters?" asked the sharp-featured little boy.

"No! Do say it was pork an' greens, now, *do*, miss!" begged the little girl who had eyes that looked too big for her diminutive face.

The toff, not being a toff at all but a poor artist who ate at the Blue Ball because it was cheap and bore no relation of any kind to

Aladdin's palace, looked from one peaky little face to the other and yielded to one of the sudden impulses that were her ruin.

"Come inside and see," she suggested, and re-entered the Blue Ball with a guest on each side of her.

Palpitating with anticipation, they would not have been surprised if she had turned into a pumpkin, or into anything, as soon as they found themselves really inside the wonderful place they had gazed at from the street for weeks past. But if she changed at all, it was only into a slightly more nervous hostess inside the Blue Ball than she had appeared to be outside when she issued her courageous invitation. Nobody, however, noticed that except the artistic waitress, who took her order and went off to tell the other artistic waitress that she wondered how ever anybody could do such a thing, and it was lucky it was nine o'clock and the place nearly empty.

"I'm all for charity. Nobody more so," continued the artistic waitress in a refined and distinct tone that reached everybody in the restaurant except the two enthralled children.

"But I don't hold with encouraging dirt. The respectable poor are never dirty. Be clean, I always say, if you can't be clever—I should say, rich."

"I'm not one to blame the poor for being poor," said the second artistic waitress, nobly. "But I don't reely think it's fair on the poor children to bring them into a place they're not accustomed to. It's the children I'm thinking of."

The first waitress, summoned just then by the disturbed cashier, explained to that lady in her glass cage that she should not like to send away the two dirty children, as directed, because they had been brought in by a regular customer, and she had just been ordered to serve two *table d'hôtes*. The cashier, at a disadvantage in her cage, agreed warmly with the waitress that she was only thinking of the poor children when she wished the regular customer at the bottom of the sea.

All this consternation had only the effect of making the regular customer reckless instead of nervous. "Of course!" she said, raising her eyebrows slightly, when the distracted waitress approached her again and asked if she wished *hors d'œuvres* as well as soup to be served. So the

first stage of the magic dinner party was reached when several minute dishes, all containing portions of dolls' house food, were placed on the blue-and-orange table before the astonished guests.

"Is that turtle an' oysters, Bill?" asked Flo, her eyes looking more disproportionate in size than ever.

"Yes," answered Billy at a venture. He glanced out of the tail of his eye at their hostess, who laughed merrily and explained that these funny bits of fish and beetroot were intended to give them an appetite.

This left Billy absolutely dumb. But Flo rose to it with all the composure of the accomplished diner-out. "Didn't I tell you it was Aladdin's palace?" she remarked with a luxurious sigh, and proceeded to whet a clamorous appetite with the entire contents of three out of the six little dishes that had been going the round of the artistic restaurant since seven o'clock.

"Is there anything else you would like?" asked their hostess, when the waitress, still pitying the poor children from the bottom of her

heart, brought two cups of coffee to wind up the glorious feast.

Billy, by this time entirely at his ease, leaned back in his chair and toyed with his spoon, as he saw the young man doing at the neighbouring blue-and-orange table. "I can't think of nothink, not at the moment I can't," he said regretfully.

But Flo sat up with determination. Not for worlds did she mean to allow a single opportunity to be wasted on this miraculous evening. "Please, could I have one of those?" she asked, pointing to the blue glass balls that hung from the ceiling all round the restaurant to show how artistic it was.

"Oh, dear!" exclaimed the disconcerted artist, on whom the manner of the waitress was beginning to have its effect, though she fought it with all the gallantry at her command. "Won't anything else do?"

Flo shook her head. "You can have the choc'lates back if I may have one of them glittering fings," she urged persuasively.

"Tell me why, and I'll see what I can do," bribed her hostess.

Flo blushed and giggled, with an apprehensive glance towards Billy. Artistic waitresses she could dismiss with a snap of her grubby fingers ; but brothers are a different matter.

Billy was quick to maintain his normal supremacy. "Git on wiv it, young Flo, an' don't keep the lady waiting," he admonished her.

Flo got on with it. "P'raps, if I was to have one of them blue balls, and p'raps if I was to turn it round an' wish, the slave might come up froo the floor like the young man in the panto an' give me this here Aladdin's palace for ever an' ever an' ever!" said Flo, in a breathless, unpunctuated rush of words.

"Open all the doors and windows before you shut up," commanded the lady in the glass cage, when the trio had departed, carrying off a blue glass ball for which the poor artist had paid the price of a week's lunches.

"I'll get the spray, too," said the waitress. "Not that I blame the poor children. They'd have liked a common place so much better, where they could have the food they're

accustomed to without intruding on those who can pay for refinement."

"And only natural," agreed her companion as she shot the bolt of the door. "It isn't right to put ideas in the heads of innocent children. They'll never be the same again, I shouldn't wonder."

CHAPTER VI

DRESSING-UP

The School Play

ON a summer afternoon, outside a shabby-looking theatre in East London, a band of young savages, brandishing wooden spears and shields, suddenly invaded the pavement. Among them were others who wore tin-foil helmets and seemed to belong to a somewhat later period in our rough island story, while several girls, dressed in costumes of corresponding dates, appeared simultaneously, laden with home-made properties, the chief of which was a spinning-wheel that had evidently begun life as part of the baby's "pram." They converged in mass formation upon the stage door, where a more mature person in twentieth-century mufti, who was trying to save the ordinary users of the pavement from total submersion, explained to the visitor that all the schools of the district were taking part in a week's pageant founded

on local history, and that this was a portion of to-day's cast.

Nobody's name was allowed to appear on the programme that was being sold inside the theatre ; but this praiseworthy attempt at anonymity was hard to maintain in the face of an audience composed of parents, from whom a little thing like a venerable beard or a Druid's robe could not possibly conceal the identity of a ten-year-old Jacky, or any other member of the cast. Fortunately, every member of the audience seemed to own a Jack or a Jill among the players ; so nobody received less—or more—applause than anybody else, and professional jealousy was pleasantly avoided. As the only impartial spectator in the house, the visitor was in the unique position of being able to judge each episode on its merits, and came away feeling, not for the first time, that London rate-payers miss a vast amount of fun through taking so little interest in the elementary schools for which they are responsible.

This pageant was an unofficial production ; and those who know something of the discouraging conditions under which teachers strive

to make school subjects attractive can understand the importance, if only in an educational sense, of trying to turn to account the child's innate love of dressing-up and "pretending." An actress, now well known, was convinced some years ago of the natural dramatic instinct to be found in all children; and at the beginning of her career she took the trouble to run a Children's Theatre in a dingy quarter of Central London, where she produced the most astonishing results out of quite ordinary material. She never made the mistake of assuming that children want to play juvenile parts and invariably like fairy tales—she used to complain that people would send her plays in which the leading parts were flowers, "and my children won't be daffodils!"—so when her pupils were not making ambitious attempts to play Fielding's "Tom Thumb" and other sophisticated dramas, she used to encourage them to dramatise songs and music by inventing their own steps and gestures.

To the visitor who used to drop in during a Saturday morning rehearsal, these child-actors seemed to be making-believe to music. They danced to Chopin or to Stravinsky; they danced

while they sang old folk songs, of English, French or Savoyard origin; sometimes, they danced in unison, sometimes as a kind of chorus to a little *première danseuse* in whirling pinafore and bare feet; and always they betrayed their kinship with the motley crowd that dances in wild abandonment to the jingle of the street organ.

Naturally, the license allowed them by their actor-manager, who looked scarcely older than themselves, led sometimes to furious argument. One morning, it was over the casting of the characters in the old folk carol, "The Cherry Tree."

"Why can't Joseph be a boy?" asked an aggrieved urchin, with some justification, the visitor thought.

"Sophy was Joseph last time," chimed in a supplanted girl; and several malcontents fell upon the complacent Sophy with the apparently unpopular suggestion, "Why cantcher be Mary, *you?*" But generally, they did not waste time over disputes; all they wanted to do was to dance, and to pretend as they danced, dressed up in any old scarves or scraps of finery their

girl friend had been able to beg or borrow for them.

The Children's Theatre came to an end, as most amateur efforts of the kind are likely to come to an end in this country, which does not yet give the theatre a definite place in national education. There was perhaps more hope of departmental approval for the comic opera produced in recent years by a boys' Central School in South-East London. Some of our predecessors would have looked upon that comic opera as a dreadful evidence of mis-spent youth, though it actually represented, not the working hours, but the playtime of the whole school, staff and pupils, for many months past, in addition to that of the adjacent girls' Central School where all the costumes were made. The libretto was written by the head-master, and the music by his three assistants, while the opera was performed solely by the boys, who also made the stage, proscenium and properties; and the science master and his pupils brought in an electric cable from the main road for the purposes of footlights and limelight. In fact, when the call came for

“ Author ” at the end of the first performance, there was not room on the boards for all who could have responded to it.

Like any folk play with a communal origin, this product of many hours of recreation was full of local allusions. “ A part of London called Bermondsey ” was one that caused joy and pride to the audience, especially when the Princess, played in traditional fashion by a boy whose golden curls protested a trifle too much, responded with the haughty remark, “ I don’t believe there is such a place. ” Anybody would have known it for a play with a cockney origin, if only for the occasional irony in it. “ Once more, all is over ! ” was a line thoroughly appreciated by the thrice-discovered conspirator who had to deliver it ; and the advice given by the Queen to her Chancellor, not to worry too much about telling the truth because, if found out, he could always say “ the reporter had got it down wrong, ” was a familiar libel that was greatly enjoyed by the spectators, all of whom probably read a newspaper from beginning to end daily, and believed every word of it.

The Christmas Party

As school performances go, the Bermondsey opera was a decidedly full-dress affair, and can hardly be regarded as typical of our London public day schools. For something more modest and less uncommon, one should obtain an invitation to an ordinary Christmas party at one of the elementary schools, where the entertainment is not nearly so ambitious or so elaborate, and recalls rather the break-up parties of one's youth, which were never distinguished by any remarkable outburst of dramatic genius.

The visitor arrived at one of these annual functions, on a December afternoon, just as the first half of the programme was drawing to a close and a small performer in a stiff white frock was working through a show "piece" on the school piano. Until that moment, the visitor had thought that this kind of thing vanished long ago with her own school days. But here it was again, making the whole world of schoolgirls kin with its arpeggios and its

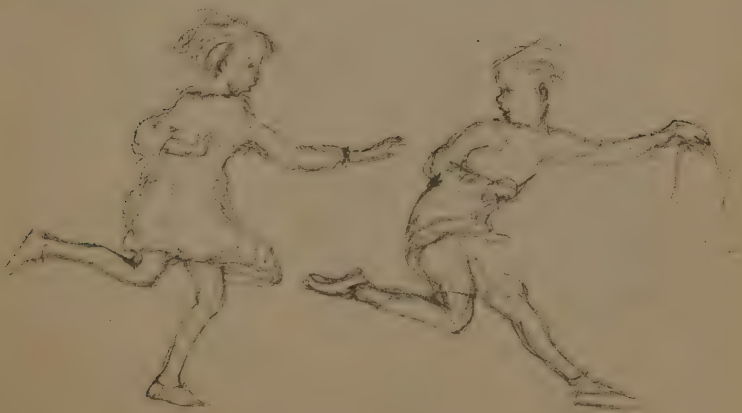
runs, with its chords that were struck on the principle of "If at first you don't succeed . . ." and its demonstration, from the first tremulous note in the treble to the last thump in the bass, of the doctrine that you should never let your right hand know what your left hand is doing.

This effort having been uproariously applauded by the pianist's own clique and received with indifference by the remainder of the two hundred girls who packed the class-room from floor to ceiling, the fairy play began without a moment's hesitation. There are no waits in an entertainment of this sort; for the performers are so anxious to do their bit that the chief difficulty of the management lies in restraining them from rushing on to the stage before their time. So the Fairy Queen and her attendant elves, all dressed exactly as the East End insists that fairies should be dressed, in white muslin and



spangles, with a shining star in the hair and a shining wand in the hand—none of your Russian ballet highbrow innovations!—walked rapidly on to the creaking platform, grouped themselves in well-drilled attitudes and began without delay to deliver rhymed couplets in sing-song voices.

“How have you used your grace to make the world a better place?” asked the Fairy Queen in sweetly reasonable tones, her eyes meanwhile ranging over the audience to see how they liked it. They liked it so well that the visitor could see their mouths forming the familiar words as they were uttered, testifying to well-attended rehearsals in the past week or two of school life. The attendant elves, barely giving their monarch time to finish asking her



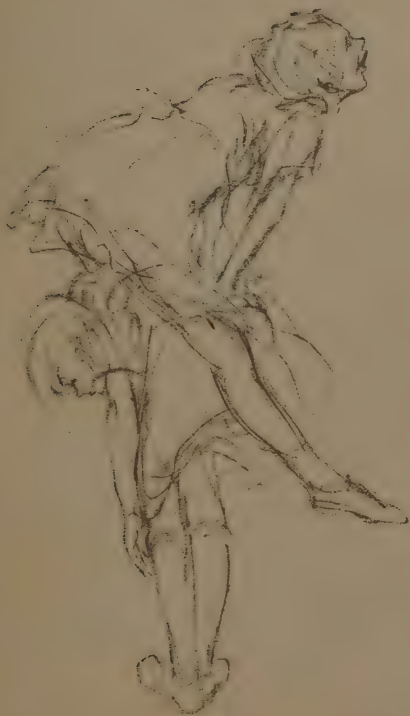
question, then unctuously described their noble deeds, one by one, for which they received the scantiest applause from the "front," being immediately cut out by the imp Mischief, clad in wicked green, who shouted at the Queen in a shockingly abandoned manner, "I've done my best to give much pain, and I shall do it o'er again!" amid the delighted cheers of the audience.

The moral was duly reinstated by the summary dismissal of the popular imp, upon which the good elves, who were nothing if not realists, asked for some reward in addition to that of virtue. The indifferent Queen replied amiably, "You shall have a tree, my elves. But you must deck it all yourselves," and with this dubious recognition of merit left them to their fate. An opportunity was thus created for the entry of the youngest elf, who had a pronounced lisp and in whose part every "s" in the play seemed to be concentrated. This little prodigy from Standard I brought in "Thingth to play wiv, Thingth to eat," till the "Chrithmath tree" was decked, and "Thanta Clauth" arrived to complete the discomfiture of the imp in green

and to bless the triumph of pure white muslin and spangles.

In the East End, tradition permits one end, and one end only, to the Christmas party; and as soon as the cast of the fairy play had been recalled for applause—or rather, had recalled themselves without waiting on halting conven-

tion—the audience became all agog with expectation, while behind the scenes a grown-up performer was struggling into red Turkey twill and cotton-wool for the second time that afternoon. At that end of the town, where the workless



always abound, Father Christmas at least is never unemployed when winter comes.

"Just come from another elementary school, and due at a third party in the Jewish quarter at six," he said in muffled woolly tones, as he shouldered his sack of oranges. "You've no idea how extremely hot and stuffy a cotton-wool beard is," he added pathetically.

But when he limped on to the stage, he got no sympathy from his two hundred hostesses, who shrieked with laughter at his groans over the simulated pains of rheumatism and old age. The headmistress politely assured him that their ribald jeers were intended to convey their intense pleasure at



seeing him there again. But you cannot explain away the elementary school child; and imagination fails to picture what their savage glee would have been had they known of his real sufferings under the cotton-wool beard. As it was, they wasted no breath on compliments; for directly he asked them, with some rashness, whether they would sooner see him or his sack of oranges, the whole audience broke into full cry with the unanimous word—
“Sack!”

“Well, they’ve spoken the truth for once, anyhow,” remarked the cynic on the school staff, a capable if unsentimental mistress, who had previously accompanied her announcement of a carol with the blunt warning, “Now, mind! When I say a carol, I don’t mean that I want any humming beforehand.” From this and some of her subsequent remarks, it could be gathered that she had one of those hearts of gold that require to be well covered up before their existence is suspected; though it must be added that the singing of carols to the word of command, and not in response to wayward fancy, did not appear to have a repressive effect

on little scoffers in white frocks who derided the creaking bones of old age.

It remains one of the marvels of elementary school life that teachers, dealing day by day with children in the mass, are still able to perform the feat of distinguishing them as individuals. To the headmistress of this school, Santa Claus was "the naughtiest of all my girls—but such a dear!" Rebecca was, indeed, said to be such a handful that her teacher asked her class in despair, one day, what they proposed should be done with so incorrigible a delinquent.

The class, fortunately not hampered by official penal restrictions, still less by plain humanity, had a ready answer to her appeal. "Lock her up in the school all night and leave her," suggested one bright spirit. Asked what good result could possibly follow from such an expedient, she explained in a hopeful tone, "Well, she might be dead in the morning."

But the drastic remedy had not been applied, and Rebecca was anything but dead at the Christmas party. Having a natural preference for wicked imps in green, the visitor asked for an introduction; and the cynic of the staff,

mentioning that Rebecca had fully sustained her reputation that afternoon by spilling her tea over another girl's best frock, added brusquely, "Here she is; you can have her if you like!"

But one did not believe much in staff cynicism when, in response to the head-mistress's reminder that there would have been no Christmas party at all if the teachers had not provided the funds out of their own pockets, and given their own spare time to its preparation, all the little Rebeccas in the room, large or small, qualifying for white or for green frocks, stamped and applauded even more noisily than they had welcomed Father Christmas's sack of oranges. And anybody aware of their frank disregard for conventional values could detect in that unanimous roar of gratitude some admission of what they knew to be owing to the teachers that transform the lives of London children who come to school, day by day, from the unloveliest of city homes.

Edward, B.C.

Edward, usually a quiet and unobtrusive child, entered his home at tea-time with a swashbuckling air. Traces of a complexion with which Nature had never endowed him still clung to his open countenance ; the gleam of battle, so often attributed in fiction to the warrior, shone in his bright little eye. It was at least disappointing when his mother, who had hurried home from the theatre to entertain Aunt Cecilia, appeared serenely unaware of his heroic impersonation.

“Make haste and wash your face under the tap,” she commanded ; “and then take the jug and fetch a ha’porth of milk.”

Edward threw his cap into the sink. It was always like that at home, he told himself. You had a glorious feeling of having been transported into another world, of being somebody new and interesting who did great things before an admiring crowd ; and then, you were brought back abruptly into your own dull shape again and sent to fetch ha’porths of milk.

He turned for sympathy to his sister. But Muriel was meekly cutting bread-and-butter as if she had never graced the boards of the borough theatre; he might have known he would get no support from her. For Muriel, being a girl, had merely played a woman's part in the pageant; and if it was always your job to practise the arts of peace—as the programme described her scene—it made very little difference whether you did it at home in a pinafore, or on the stage in a Celtic smock. It was easy enough for Muriel to come home and behave as if nothing unusual had happened to her—because it hadn't.

Edward, unfortunately, was in no mood to reason; and the sight of Muriel thus engaged irritated him beyond endurance. "Hail, Caesar!" he cried recklessly, striking her on the head with the milk-jug. "Hither to the milko-shoppo!"

"He's not been the same boy since they chose him to be one of those early Britons," apologised Edward's mother for her sister's benefit, when Edward had been eliminated and Muriel warned against reprisals.

The same boy ! Edward removed something more than an early Briton's grease-paint from his eyes, as he scrubbed his face with the towel. Of course he wasn't the same boy. If he could help it, he never meant to be the same boy again.

But when he returned later from the milk shop and saw the family seated round the table as if nothing epoch-making had happened to one of their number since dinner-time—he didn't count Muriel—he wondered whether he was going to be able to help it, after all. For a moment he hovered on the border line of indecision between vision and disillusionment, where a man sometimes decides whether his fate is to be that of the banished hero wandering over the face of the earth, or only that of the crushed son in the family circle, who runs errands when he is told.

Like many another, Edward evaded this mighty choice, and, in compromising, became merely tiresome. With a burst of intolerance, he wrenched the docile Muriel from her chair and flung her on the floor, as the early Britons in the pageant had treated the Roman captives. He was naturally misunderstood.

“I’m not being a naughty boy!” he roared, when his father, who had not attended the pageant, locked him in the scullery without any tea. “I’m only being an early Briton!”

“Eddie’s such a silly,” remarked the damaged, though pleasantly avenged Roman captive, resuming her seat and her tea. “He will go on behaving as if this was still early Britain.”

“Well, isn’t it?” wondered Aunt Cecilia, intervening for the first time in the unrehearsed episode of the pageant that was being performed in the home.

Aunt Cecilia was a school teacher from another part of London, and she had merely attended the performance in the theatre in respect of her relationship to the cast. There was nothing controversial in her tone as she made her cryptic remark; but her brother-in-law at once looked alert, and his wife looked apprehensive. Aunt Cecilia, as was well known, had views on education, extending to the upbringing of children in the home; and they were not the views that were held by the father of Edward and Muriel. She had even been heard to say that his views were “mossgrown,” though as a rule, when

she came to tea, she was very reticent on the subject, especially before the children. But with Aunt Cecilia, as their mother so often put it, "you never knew."

Muriel remained placid, though her protuberant blue eyes grew, if anything, rather more protuberant. "Funny Aunt Cecilia!" she simpered. "Why, of course we're not in early Britain any more. Early Britain was in B.C., and we're in A.D."

"I sit rebuked," answered Aunt Cecilia, which pleased Muriel very much, for she liked being proved correct. And when her aunt went on to say how much credit the pageant reflected on the teachers and the schoolchildren of the neighbourhood, it seemed as though for the moment hostilities had been averted and the arts of peace had emerged triumphant. One secret of Aunt Cecilia's success, which followed her wherever she went in spite of her heretical opinions, was that she never failed to give praise where praise was due.

Still, as her sister was also wont to say about her, Aunt Cecilia never knew how to "let well alone." In the next pause that occurred, she

once more threatened to create a crisis by asking if Edward might not be considered sufficiently punished by this time for something he hadn't really done; and could she not go and bring him back to the tea table?

This was the kind of opening that Edward's father could not ignore. In vain the repentant Aunt Cecilia, responding to her sister's reproachful glance, asked wildly after the baby's tooth, and even sank to a discussion about artificial silk. Beneath these well-meant efforts to protrude the arts of peace, Edward's father could be heard muttering a caustic commentary on new-fangled notions, emanating, as everybody knew, from German professors or advanced young women, neither of whom had any children of their own.

"When I was a boy," he continued, raising his voice above the feminine flow of arguments for and against artificial silk, "naughtiness was called plain naughtiness and punished—*punished*——"

"No, you can't iron it," hurriedly agreed Aunt Cecilia, also raising her voice.

"Punished," repeated Edward's father yet again, being evidently under the impression that

if you said a thing three times it must be accepted. "You knew where you were in those days, before all this scientific rubbish got about, confusing a child's mind till he doesn't know right from wrong. . . ."

"But you can *press* it, Cecilia," his wife said shrilly, adding in an agonized undertone, "Don't argue with him; it only makes him worse."

Cecilia endeavoured to act upon this advice, and leapt from artificial silk to flannelette. But when Edward's father descended to the lower depths by asserting that he was none the worse for the floggings of his youth, and it was high time the same treatment was applied to Edward, she pushed back her chair and rose with decision.

Of course, everybody at the tea table felt then that the arts of peace had received their quietus. They forgot that, with Aunt Cecilia, "you never knew."

Without so much as looking at her brother-in-law, she walked to the scullery door and unlocked it.

"Come out, little early Briton," she said with her brightest smile. "You were right and we were wrong. This is still B.C."

CHAPTER VII

PLAYING IN SCHOOL TIME

On the Common

“THESE boys,” said the boys’ master, “would never dream of walking up the hill to the Common on their own account. They just play in the streets round their own homes, and don’t seem to realise that they’ve got a bit of the country, as it were, almost within a walk.”

The visitor had met Standard VII of a boys’ Council school from West London, on Wimbledon Common, where they meant to spend a couple of hours on an autumn afternoon, studying Nature. The tendency of Whitehall to spell Economy with a bigger E than Education had, it appeared, recently curtailed these school rambles, which used to extend into the real country but were now limited to the heaths and commons near town. Exploration becomes a much tamer affair under these straitened conditions ; but if the call of the wild is a fainter

call on Putney Heath than in Surrey woods, there are compensations, as the master pointed out.

“It isn’t so good for nature study as our country excursions, but it tells the boys that the common and the heath are there,” was the way he put it. “You can study Nature in your back-yard if you want to,” he went on in the tone of the enthusiast; “and even a walk on a London common will open up their minds and stir their spirit of adventure.”

The spirit of adventure was undoubtedly stirred, and at times it even called for the reminder that this was a class held during school hours, and not a holiday excursion in search of “conker” chestnuts. Forty youngsters, free for a whole afternoon from the schoolroom and its restraints, had naturally to be curbed in more ways than one; and their determination to test the edibility of nature specimens called particularly for vigilance.

“You wouldn’t think, would you now, that a boy would want to eat an acorn?” asked their teacher sadly, as he dissuaded one of them from this engaging attempt.

Well, cold reason would perhaps answer "No," but not the recollection of a childhood passed among boys. Reminiscence helped equally to dissipate the visitor's anxiety as to the consequences of eating bryony berries or "blusher" fungus, or any other of the autumn fruits that were gathered in the course of the



afternoon. But meanwhile, the consideration shown by the master for the forty mothers waiting at home for the return of the young botanists commanded admiration.

In spite of many distractions it was not really difficult to remain educational, our quest being in itself a fascinating one and as far removed from a plain botany lesson as even a frivolous schoolboy could wish. Divided into three squads, we went roaming over the Common, through copses and along streams, collecting berries and seeds and leaves, though always with respect for Nature's own needs. Careless destruc-



tion was sternly discouraged, and a pleasing mark of the townsman appeared in our leader's admonition that one specimen of each variety was enough for the purpose and the rest should be "left for other people." The visitor caught herself speculating how long it would be before these little Londoners would

grow up into those big Londoners who go out into fields and woods on a public holiday and rarely behave as if they had been reared on the self-denying precepts of the Nature study class.

Some of the children had brought paper bags and wallets for their specimens ; some carried in their hands their bits of dogwood, white beam, and other trees and shrubs whose existence is rarely dreamed of by grown-up people who have all the time there is for exploring Wimbledon Common. Now and then, a beautiful orange-coloured, or mauve, or brown velvety fungus was pounced upon with a shout of delight and brought to be identified and described ; and when an obliging robin sang to the expedition with charming grace, he too became an excuse for information.

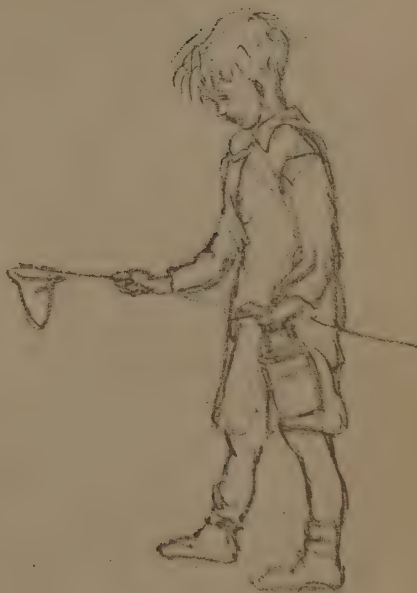
“ What bird did we hear last time we came ? ” was a question that brought the prompt reply in several voices, “ Willow warbler, sir ! ” and incidentally taught a surprised visitor that this little nomad spends part of its annual sojourn in England within the sound of Putney church bells.

The more human subject of boy study was apparently included with that of Nature study in this particular teacher's equipment; for at half-time—strictly in accordance with the school time-table, he was careful to explain—a ten minutes' interval was allowed for a game. Instantly, a football was produced as from nowhere, to be bounced in a professional manner from one hard round head to another. But some undaunted spirits, with an optimism that was not justified by results, used the interval to search for chestnuts under trees that had long been swept clear. "Whatever else they miss in the way of Nature specimens, these boys can see a chestnut tree a mile off," the visitor was told with gentle sarcasm.

There were several moments during the afternoon when one felt glad to have long outgrown school age; and one of these occurred when the boys were told to note every twist and turn of the walk home, so that a map of it could be drawn from memory on the morrow. But Standard VII did not seem to share the visitor's view of this dreadful test of their sense of direction, and nobody appeared to be crushed

at the thought of to-morrow's task. For that matter, it would have been difficult to believe that these forty irrepressibles could be crushed by anything; and, not for the first time, one wondered if there is ever a time when the London child is depressed.

"I want them to love Nature as I do," observed their master, on the way back to the quarter of the town where most of his boys lived. He had every reason to rejoice in the possession of a taste that had so well repaid him for the sacrifice of the spare time of years. As a pupil teacher of fourteen—in those days with a salary of eighteenpence a week—he first took up the hobby which he was now able to use as a special school subject. "In some schools," he



went on to explain, "where the teacher has, perhaps, specialised in pure science, they take that instead; but Nature study has this advantage over pure science, that it can be followed up all through life, outside the laboratory and at little cost to the student. One of my old boys, now working in the building trade, is devoting all his spare time to the study of the humble bee; and a lot of the fellows you see here to-day are beginning to take out books on birds and flowers from the free library."

"Gives them a new interest, you see," was the modest summary of a man who had never lived out of London himself, or enjoyed any facilities for research, but who loved Nature in the sort of simple instinctive way that made him brother to the scholar who once made Nature almost fashionable by loving her in a Hampshire parsonage.

To give a new interest to Standard VII is one of those achievements—not perhaps a rare achievement, as can be guessed from a glance at the special subjects taught both in boys' and girls' public day schools throughout London—

which can easily pass unnoticed in a world that is more concerned with the material results of education than with the spiritual accompaniment of those results. The boys who went a-rambling on Wimbledon Common, that autumn afternoon, were the sons of railwaymen, of small—very small—shopkeepers, of engineers, bricklayers, and labourers of all sorts. One, it is true, possibly looked forward to a career slightly more in keeping with Nature study than the rest; for a comment on the unusual agility and grace of his movements produced the unexpected information that his father toured every Christmas as the pantomime cat. But out of all his companions, few if any would grow up to find their greatest happiness, as the more fortunate among us do occasionally find it, in the work they would be doing for their living.

“A new interest” would perhaps make them independent of the soul-destroying effects of any monotonous work into which the struggle for existence might force them in the future; and it is one of the rare by-products of the mass teaching rendered compulsory by the size of

the classes in London schools that a new idea, broadcast to forty scholars, may find a home in the mind of one of them, to his lasting joy. And that is, after all, nearly as much as can be claimed for the most perfect system of education yet devised.

In the Swimming-Bath

The sight of Rose, standing all a-quiver on the brink of the shallow end of the swimming-bath, took the visitor back over the years to another first swimming-lesson, the heroine of which stood equally appalled before the disastrous discovery that three feet of water becomes suddenly fathomless when it is no longer permissible to keep one foot firmly planted on the ground. It is always assumed that human nature is capable of infinite variety, and I suppose this is as true as most aphorisms. But Rose's conviction that she was faced by imminent danger of drowning in thirty-six inches of tepid water, and her inability to accept the statement that this same tepid water was "quite

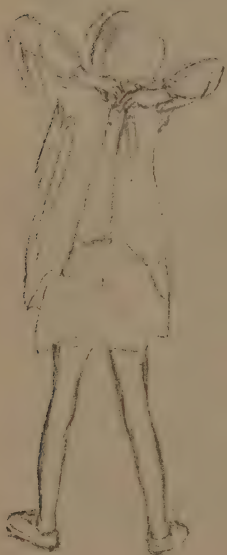
warm " and not close upon freezing point, or the equally incredible statement that she would not sink if she did everything she was told to do, indicated that there is little variety in the absurd fears and suspicions and utter want of faith that accompany everybody's first swimming lesson, whether it occurs in a London swimming-bath or in the deep blue sea.

On this occasion it was occurring in a London swimming-bath, situated in the middle of dock-land, where learning to swim is something vastly more significant than just another way of helping the young Londoner to play in school time. But it is doubtful if Rose, or any other elementary school child who may be found learning to swim in this way during the summer term, consciously looks forward to winning a medal for saving somebody else from drowning, although a number of such medals, running by this time into hundreds, have been won by children who attend the elementary schools. To the little swimmers themselves, swimming day is the



red letter day of the week, so eagerly looked forward to that there is at least one school on record that rushed back early to town from a day's excursion into the country sooner than miss the weekly treat.

Rose was in Standard IV of a large girls' school down among the wharves; and it was Standard IV that was taking its turn in the bath, the day the visitor happened to stroll in. At the moment, quite evidently, Rose's pleasure in the long anticipated swimming lesson might have been more correctly defined as pain.



"I never allow them to give way to nervousness," said the swimming-mistress, apparently to the visitor, but in a clear tone that could not fail to reach the shivering little figure in the red cotton costume that still hesitated miserably on the top step at the shallow end. "Fear is so infectious. One frightened child will send a panic through a

whole class, and then you can't do anything with them."

The listener, with her eye on Rose—or, more accurately, on that other little girl, who, decades ago, stood sick with fear before three feet of heaving green water—suggested that some kinds of timidity were never overcome all through life, if treated too brutally at the onset. One might grow a complex about deep water, for instance. . . .

But the swimming-mistress had her eye on Rose alone; and Rose's school was the tenth to which she had given a twenty minutes' lesson that day.

"Never knew a child yet who couldn't get over her nervousness, if she knew she'd got to," interrupted the swimming-mistress briskly, in the same penetrating voice. "'The worst case I ever had was a coster's child. She set the whole lot of them quaking like jelly-fish—perfectly fatal, you know!—till I had the happy idea of throwing her in at the deep end and fishing her out with the pole. That cured her!'" She smiled reminiscently, and, pole in hand, moved almost imperceptibly towards Rose.

With the desperation that is born of a worse horror coming from behind, Rose shut her eyes tight, grasped her nose tightly with one hand, and bobbed her face quite a couple of inches below the surface of the water.

“Good girl!” cried the swimming-mistress as the child emerged again, gasping and sputtering, but proudly conscious of heroism. Every principle of psycho-analysis had been violated; but the fact remained that the child with the threatened complex had overcome her timidity because “she knew she’d got to.” And if another nail were needed in order to seal Freud and all his disciples in their several coffins, it was forthcoming when a reckless, laughing little creature mounted the top diving-stand at the other end of the bath, sprang from it head-first with the nonchalance we all dream of showing when we go in off the deep end, and swam half the length under water. “That’s the coster’s child I told you about,” added the swimming-mistress over her shoulder.

Rose was only one among several who were there for the first time, and she was soon left to flounder happily by herself while the instructor

took the rest of the beginners *en masse*, as there appeared to be no Roses among them. "Now then, jump in!" she called cheerily to the row of skinny little people with legs like faggots, who stood waiting eagerly on the brink. "No chattering, there! One, two——!"

They were all in before she could say "Three!" the process of jumping in suggesting that balance of body is not necessarily one of Nature's gifts to her children.

To the onlooker they appeared small enough to please any taste for the immature; yet the swimming-mistress complained that the authorities did not allow her to have the lower Standards to teach. "I could turn out some really good swimmers if I had them younger," she said, before she went off to give her undivided attention to the material that the London County Council did deliver into her capable hands.

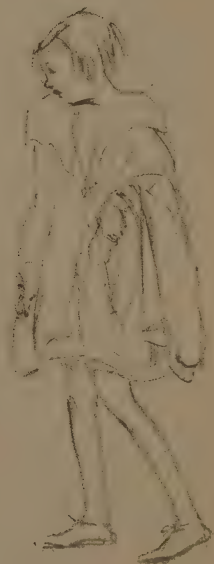
The visitor felt that all this depended upon the point of view. Looking at the shallow end, densely populated with splashing, wriggling and invertebrate bits of jelly-fish, she wondered how anybody, even the experienced lady with the

pole in her hand, could ever make them into swimmers in the short time at her command. And then, she looked at the deep end, beyond the floating bar that marked the division between those who could swim a whole length unaided and those who were still in the jelly-fish stage; and it became evident that somehow or another the miracle had been achieved, and accomplished water-babies dived and raced and did showy side-strokes and all the other things that only those can do who no longer feel in imminent danger of drowning in three feet of tepid water. Psychology or no psychology, that swimming-mistress did know how to turn a jelly-fish into a water-baby in the few weeks of the school year that elapse between Easter and September.

The head-mistress who was responsible for Standard IV came and pointed out Muriel, who had just triumphantly passed her test and crossed the floating bar of distinction for the first time. "See that child?" she asked. "She's got a club foot, and I was criticised for including her on the swimming-list, because we're rationed, you know, and can't bring the whole school. But I said to myself, 'Here's Muriel who can't play

games or do things like other girls, and she's getting morbid about it. Swimming might be the saving of her, and I believe she could learn.' Well, it's been her saving; she's a different child; look at her!" One looked; and, the poor misshapen foot being under water, there was nothing to show that Muriel differed from any other water-baby, except perhaps in the special glow of complete bliss in which she seemed to be enveloped. She may never win a life-saving medal. But her head-mistress deserves one.

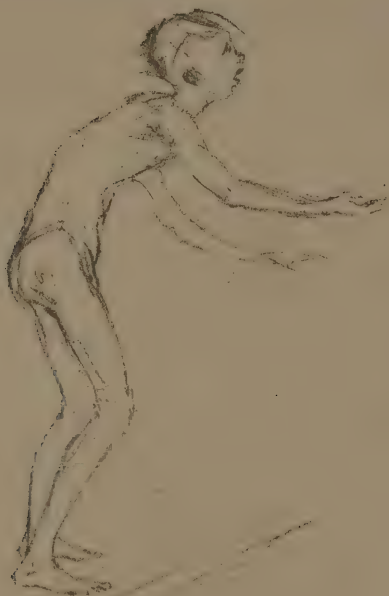
Any Londoner can see how some of his rates and taxes go to teach young London to swim, if he chooses on a summer day to follow a chattering crocodile of boys or girls, carrying towels and combs, inside a London swimming-bath. With a very little imagination he may also conjure up a vision of homes in by-streets from which they come, where it is never easy



to wash thoroughly even once a day, where there is not air enough to breathe, nor any privacy, nor a cool bed to one's self, nor any of the amenities that make a summer existence in town pleasant to wealthier townspeople. To be clean and cool and free of clothes for twenty minutes, once a week; to learn how to save your own life and somebody else's, if the chance occurs; to rush through your dressing afterwards with damp fingers in the hope of being ready first and so earning a blue ticket, three of which will give you an extra swim on another day; to save up your halfpence to go to the baths instead of the picture palace; all these entrancing joys are ready to the hand of those boys and girls for whose education the London ratepayer pays, but so often without looking to see where his money goes.

The ghost of Squeers came and walked by the side of the visitor, on her way back to the London that lies west of Aldgate pump:—"We go upon the practical method of teaching, Nickleby. . . . When a boy has learnt that bottiney means a knowledge of plants, he goes and weeds 'em. When he knows how to

spell swimming-bath, he goes and saves Fanny Squeers from drowning. . . .”



CHAPTER VIII

LEARNING IN PLAYTIME

On a Plot of London Clay

THE little Londoner who races out of school at four o'clock in the afternoon is not wholly free of a benevolent Government. Although the various schemes for dealing with his playtime generally owe their origin to private enterprise, they frequently end in being blessed by the State whether directly from Whitehall or indirectly and municipally. In this way, the London Children's Gardens and Recreation Fund, started by a small group of child lovers in 1911, has grown into a flourishing concern that is now partly supported by a grant from the Board of Education, and affects some hundreds of children weekly.

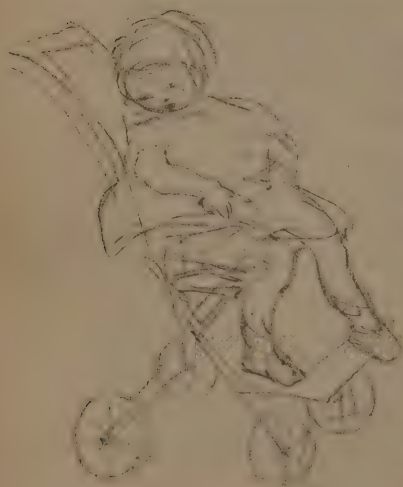
Perhaps it is through this semi-departmental connection that the enterprise comes to be described in its official publications as providing "outdoor recreation for children in the poorest districts after school hours." But the official

label is rather less adequate than the general run of official labels; for no child that ever breathed would associate the thrill of possessing a garden of his very own with anything so pompous as "outdoor recreation." The most spacious estate in the world will not bring to a millionaire's children the personal delight that comes with the acquisition of a private patch in one corner of it, where bulbs and seeds may be planted and dug up again to see how they are getting on, and names may be sown in mustard and cress with an eternal disregard of that provoking law of Nature which decrees that one shall come up sooner than the other. There is no class distinction in the child's desire to dig and sow and water—especially to water—in a plot of ground of his very own.

But the thrill is no doubt greater when "his dear papa is poor," and when he rarely goes into the country or sees a private flower garden; and the glory of lording it over a patch of London clay, eight feet by ten—termed by the irreverent and envious (from a safe distance) a "dog's grave"—is quite unaffected by the fact that gardening is part of an educational

adventure, smiled upon by superior people who inhabit offices in Whitehall that are called departments. Except that the little gardeners are expected to take their garden seriously and are taught by a gardening expert, there is outwardly very little that is educational in this very delightful adventure. The people who are more likely to be educated through it are the grown-up inhabitants of the various districts in which these open spaces occur; for every one of the eight gardens now belonging to the Fund was originally a waste piece of ground,

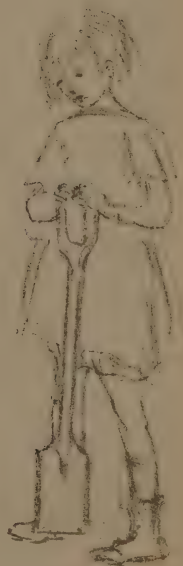
used principally as a refuse heap, and its clearance and conversion into eighty or ninety children's gardens usually results in a marked improvement in the hygienic standards of the surrounding householders as well as an improvement in the public health. In one neighbourhood, according to



the Medical Officer of Health, there was always endemic sore throat in the houses overlooking the enclosure until Lady Lyons and her energetic helpers came along and cleaned it up for their purpose.

Naturally, this beneficent result is never achieved at once or without opposition. Parents of the lucky tenants of garden plots are easily converted; but the temptation to continue throwing dead cats and bottles into them is less readily resisted by others whose children were perforce passed over when the plots were allocated. It is impossible to bring the annoyance home to the right offender, so this is wisely assumed in most cases to have been accidental. But there are limits to so charitable an assumption, as the visitor was told when she was being shown round one of the gardens on a fine summer evening.

"Once," said the grown-up gardener, "we found nine dead



cats to welcome us when we arrived after school hours—all laid out neatly on the ground in a kind of pattern. You couldn't possibly pretend that was an accident ! ”

But time and the children themselves are the best educators of any neighbourhood, and not long after a garden has been established it becomes the pride of every one within reach. The children are selected from among the physically fit pupils of the elementary schools near by ; and each child holds a plot for a year and chooses what shall be grown on it. On the whole, girls seem more anxious to grow flowers, and boys to grow vegetables ; but there is no fixed rule about this, and all unite in a passion for watering. However wet the ground, they arrive on the scene clamouring hopefully for the water-can ; and much tact has to be displayed sometimes to avoid disappointment and to save the gardens from total immersion. Occasionally, the little gardeners see the joke of this themselves.

“ See that tomato, miss ? ” asks one young imp, pointing to a minute seedling in a rival plot. “ Or p'raps you can't see it ? I shouldn't

wonder! It's shrunk to nuffink wiv being watered."

One thing is certain ; every plot holder knows by heart his precious little store of plants ; and one day, two boys nearly came to blows over the disappearance of an onion plant and its alleged reappearance in somebody else's garden along the row.

"I never took his onion, I swear I didn't!" declared the accused one, when the superintendent intervened.

"Will you swear it on the Bible?" demanded the owner of the lost onion.

"'Course I'll swear it on the Bible!" was the ready answer.

This seemed final to the superintendent. But the aggrieved boy was more sceptical. "Will you swear it on your honour as a Scout?" he asked.

The pilferer of onions wavered, and was lost. No, he could not bring himself to perjure



his honour as a Boy Scout ; and the disputed vegetable was triumphantly dug up again and transferred to its original patch of clay.

It would be easy enough to smile at the cockney ignorance sometimes displayed by children who have never pursued the career of any vegetable further back than the shop where it was bought. One little girl did actually exclaim in a tone of rapture, when she saw the eternal miracle taking place, "I always thought cabbages grewed on barrers." But I do not think this is any funnier, and it is infinitely more excusable, than the ignorance that is constantly shown when a grown-up townsman is confronted with a spray of potato flower, away from its context, and asked to identify it. What matters is that in eight of the dreariest and most densely



crowded districts of London, such as Deptford and St. Pancras and Notting Hill and Stepney and Bethnal Green, London children are learning to make miracles happen in little plots of London clay, and incidentally planting a bit of the country there for all who pass by to enjoy. Meanwhile, undersized limbs are growing and narrow chests are expanding, as a result of this "outdoor recreation after school hours"; nor must it be forgotten that, as the season goes on, one after another of the proud young gardeners takes home a dish of peas or beans or spinach for the Sunday dinner.

A difficult problem for the grown-up gardener who presides over each enclosure is that of the "minder." All schoolgirls in by-streets, and many schoolboys, are minders of younger children out of school hours; and it is an unwritten law of minding that the minded have to accompany their minders wherever they go until bedtime. The superintendent generally finds that the simplest solution is to allow the younger children to come in with the others as visitors, this being on the whole less harassing than to shut them outside, where they have to be

constantly shouted at by the minders inside, and are in perpetual danger of being run over. To teach gardening in one of these enclosures must in any case be an evasion of difficulties, for if the minders are not shrilly vocalising their responsibilities, hawkers add to the din of traffic by shouting their wares, and organs by playing with distracting audibility.

Occasionally, it is true, the minder solves the problem in original fashion. One evening, for instance, an officious informant, revelling in her self-imposed task, approached the grown-up gardener with a horrified expression, and announced that "Tommy Wilson has buried his twins!"

"Well, they can't 'op it, anyhow!" remarked Tommy Wilson, when he was discovered unconcernedly watering everything within reach, including—only by chance, however, as taking them in his stride—the two babies



whom he had planted up to their waists among the cabbages.

In the Children's Library

"I wish people would send us money instead of books," sighed one of the assistants at a children's library, into which the visitor had wandered on a winter's evening after school hours. "We know what the children want, and other people don't. I am always being given books 'for the thoughtful child,'" she went on. "But the thoughtful child can take care of itself! What we want here is an interesting story-book, simply written and full of incident, the sort of book that will encourage the thoughtless child to read instead of larking about the streets and getting into mischief. Anybody can have the thoughtful child!"

Probably the cinema habit is responsible for a good deal of the restlessness which makes it difficult for the librarian to induce a habit of reading in town children. They have been

spoilt by the film drama and its scrappy method of throwing on the screen one blood-curdling adventure after another, a method that demands no intellectual effort or concentration on the part of the spectator; and to expect a child, accustomed to this sort of thing, to settle down to read one of Scott's novels unabridged, or "Robinson Crusoe" as written by Defoe, is not reasonable. Only the young reader of the past, unacquainted with the sensations of the picture palace, could manage to extract thrills from classics of this kind.

Concentration is naturally the last thing that is learnt by the elementary school child. Neither his education as one of a regiment, nor his normal life out of schooltime, with its total lack of repose and regular hours, is calculated to produce in him that capacity for sitting still and thinking about one thing at a time which constitutes the "thoughtful child." Even without the rivalry of the cinema to contend with, the librarian would have a difficult task in capturing these little pieces of quicksilver and persuading them that it is really great fun to come to a library and read books. Yet the

task is not only attempted but performed ; and in many Free Libraries nowadays there is a children's department, where boys and girls from about nine years upwards may not only take away books to read at home, but are also encouraged to come and read out of school hours, every evening and on Saturdays. It is one of the most successful ways in which an enlightened municipality can give to the children of our back streets the kind of intellectual enjoyment that poverty and bad housing render impracticable in the majority of their homes.

In a very fine public library South of the river, the children's department is situated on the top floor, and a fatherly committee has thoughtfully covered the stairs that lead up to it with rubber, so that the serious (or curmudgeonly) grown-up reader may not be disturbed by the sound of dozens of little feet as they go pattering upstairs. Bermondsey's "Beautification Committee" has filled the window-sills of this attractive-looking room with growing plants in pots ; and the librarian, who is an enthusiast in the matter, has added a screen covered with coloured pictures, which

he changes from time to time and which consist of excellent reproductions of famous paintings, or historic prints of the borough. It is a delightful room; and the low tables and chairs are chosen with a regard for readers whose backs grow more easily tired than those of children who are better fed and more accustomed to sitting still.

Any child can obtain a reader's ticket by bringing a written recommendation from a parent or teacher. The librarian, rather like a magician, or even a large kind spider, sits on the top floor behind a wicket gate, which opens easily enough from without, but, having admitted the guileless reader, keeps him captive there until it is the will of the magician that he shall be released. But the visitor who went there gathered that the captive is never anxious to be released, and that some three to four hundred children use the library daily. "Do you insist on silence?" the librarian was asked; and he smiled indulgently. "Reasonable silence," he answered with a twinkle in his eye, and by that answer seemed to establish his right to be where he is.

Of course, all the captives who are caught on the inner side of that wicket gate are not born readers. In the early days of the library, when a book indicator was in use, it was a favourite game with the children to pick out a ticket at random and see what book it produced at the desk. This was, perhaps, quite a good sort of game to play with a librarian who looked like a magician, but it did not always produce a prize for the young players; and he soon had the happy idea of substituting a card-index, arranged in subjects, to which the children were given free access. The plan worked admirably; and reading began to be taken more seriously when the reader could walk up independently to the index, pull out a drawer and run through the titles of the books arranged under the subject he had chosen, until he came to one that sounded promising. Even if his choice turned out to be a poor one, it was his own.

Regarding subjects, the visitor was interested to hear that at the Bermondsey library "we cannot keep pace with the demand for fairy tales," while another section almost equally popular seems to be that devoted to poetry and

plays. Magazines are much in demand, the lazy reader with the cinema mind existing here as elsewhere. But the discriminating reader who is born, not made, is not the chief concern of librarians like the wise guardian of this children's department, who probably thinks it more important to get hold of the lazy reader, and turn him into a real lover of books by letting him coquette with as many as he likes until he does acquire the habit of wanting to read something. If his taste is not perfect in the end, the grown-up reader, conscious of the rubbish that is swallowed in the name of light reading in the library downstairs, can hardly afford to be critical of the frivolous reader on the top floor.

In addition to these municipal enterprises there are a certain number of children's libraries run by social reformers, who try by this means to persuade the London child that reading is as good a way as any other of passing the time out of school. One example of these private enterprises is the David Copperfield Library in Somerstown, where the boys and girls of a particularly poor neighbourhood go nightly, wash their hands and put on overalls, after

which they can roam about the book shelves to their hearts' content, besides playing games under the direction of two grown-up helpers. The kind of readers one finds frequenting all children's libraries vary more or less according to the length of time the reading-room has been open. When I visited the one attached to the Cambridge Settlement in South-East London, it had not been open more than two years, and many of the readers were still in the primitive stage of standing bewildered before the wealth of choice at their command. The following was a typical dialogue, overheard in the room adjoining the reading-room, where the books were given out:—

“What are you looking for?”

“A book to read.”

“What kind of book?”

“A nice book.”

“Yes, but what sort of nice book? Adventures?”

“Oh, yes, please! No, not about the sea. . . . Oh, *not* historical! Nor yet fighting; at least . . . well, I want somefing—somefing *exciting*!”

Remembering a nursery bookshelf of older days, in which every book was well thumbed with being read over and over again, the visitor could appreciate to some extent the temporary indecision of a reader faced by hundreds of books, while sympathising at the same time with the librarian's assistant. For the librarian's assistant dared not hurry the choice of any one of the applicants, however many clamoured for her attention, for this would only mean that as soon as he was seated in the reading-room with his book, up would go his hand for leave to change it.

The librarian, for whom this signal was intended, would then be given a string of reasons why the book must be changed, their plausibility varying according to the audacity of the reader. He had already finished it (this required great courage); he had read it before; he found it too difficult, and so on. Sometimes, he might be coaxed into trying it again; but if nothing else availed, the restless young creature would be transferred to a bench filled with similar malcontents, all awaiting their turn to go again into the book room. In time, of

course, most of them would learn that a dull book persevered with might prove a treasure of delight ; but that sort of discovery is not made offhand by a youngster, only recently captured from the playground of the street and set down before a book which happens not to be the sort of book that plunges straight, without any preliminary description, into a thrilling narrative.

Even in the early days of a children's library, however, the born readers are discernible ; and this group is rapidly swelled by others who become readers as reading is thrust upon them. At the Cambridge Settlement, these regular readers, amounting to some seventy or eighty a week, seemed to ask principally for simplified editions of the classics—Dickens, Scott, “ Robinson Crusoe,” “ Pilgrim's Progress,” the adventures of Robin Hood ; they also read with avidity short stories about everyday children, and a good many of them, generally the girls, liked fairy tales and legends.

The appearance of a book seemed to count for a good deal when a choice was being made. A row of morocco-bound books was left almost untouched : “ Oh, *no* ! They look like *prizes* ! ”

said these young cynics of the elementary school. Some capital adventure stories, unfortunately bound in stiff covers as if they were school readers, were equally boycotted. On the other hand, classics brought out in too simplified a form, in small quarto volumes, were rejected, not because of their contents which were not even tested, but because they looked like "baby books." For the same reason large type acted as a deterrent, although a picture on the cover, especially a sensational picture, almost always caused a book to be given a trial.

Girls seemed to be more easily satisfied than boys, or perhaps girls as a whole have more power of concentration than their brothers. Certainly, the most absorbed readers encountered that evening by the visitor were three little girls seated at one table, who were buried, respectively, in "David Copperfield," "Tales from Beowulf," and Hans Andersen's fairy tales. But you never can tell. The scatter-brained girl and the thoughtful boy will always arise to upset all one's theories about girl and boy nature, whether one goes out to look for children in by-streets or in palaces.

The age of admission to this children's library was eight; and as the visitor passed out, a number of small applicants below that age waited hopefully at the gate. "Please, may I come in?" clamoured one; "I'm only seven"—she looked about five—"but my brother comes here!" She took her dismissal quite philosophically; but, like many another from the eight or ten elementary schools that supply the readers for the library, she probably came back, a night or two later, and tried again.

The value of the children's library is not to be estimated by the amount that is read there on so many nights in the week, or even by the advantages that a clean warm room offers on a winter's night over the fascinations of the streets; but chiefly by the extent to which it succeeds in giving these children of the people early in childhood a taste for reading that, once acquired, will enrich their whole lives hereafter. It could do no greater thing for a King's child.

CHAPTER IX

BEING NAUGHTY

The Children's Court

THE child in fiction has almost ceased in our time to be the little "che-ild" of melodrama that used to bring a lump into the throat of the Victorian playgoer. Modern surgery has operated upon that lump as energetically as upon tonsils and adenoids. But we do not necessarily understand the children of our back streets because we have ceased to idealise them; they are much more complex than that, and the circumstances of their lives gives them a knowledge of the world that not only rules out sentimentality, but also offers wide scope for the transmutation of perfectly wholesome impulses into pretty nasty habits and even vices.

The very lying of such children, and they do lie cleverly and universally, is a common manifestation of the ironic cockney spirit which resents interference and scorns appeals to the

feelings. "Beefsteak pudding, wiv apple tart to foller!" was the swift retort of an obviously starving child who was tactlessly asked in the presence of others what she had had for dinner. And a junior club girl, whom a new helper in an incredibly weak moment complimented on



the way she was singing over her work, was equally ready with a crushing disclaimer. "Voice?" she scoffed. "That ain't voice! That's 'cos I had birdseed for my tea!" This kind of jading experience helps to confirm one's occasional astonishment that the greatest of London's writers about children was the creator both of little Nell and Susan Nipper; for while the one is exactly the kind of noble child an inexperienced social worker might hope to find in her girls' club, the other is what she generally does find. "Ordering one's self lowly and

reverently towards one's betters is not to be a worshipper of graven images, and I must and will speak!" said Susan Nipper to old Dombey in a glorious moment of defiance. But it might have been said by any little London girl to any "graven image" who tried to repress her.

It is certainly useless to try to fathom the motives of the so-called "delinquents"—at least a gentler title than the "juvenile criminal" of former days!—who find their way into the Children's Courts, unless we admit at once that they are for the most part sophisticated young persons who are already rich in experience of the world, though they may remain innocent at heart in spite of this. One caught a glimpse of this mixture of childishness and prematurity in the little minx who had been sent on probation to a country home, after running wild in the streets of London for the whole of her short life. "You seem fond of boys," remarked an elderly gentleman who was a friend of the family. "I am," she replied, smiling up at him slyly as she slipped her hand in his; "but I prefer them bigger." To see her romping,

the moment after, with other children, and acting as mother to one little creature who needed protection, pointed to her being in reality a perfectly normal child, whatever her acquired knowledge of life might be; but her future, had she been either repressed in an institution or left in her own undesirable surroundings at home, would not have been a promising one.

The child who is naughty in the eyes of the law is gradually being legislated out of existence. He has been removed from the old Children's Court, which used to be held in a room on police court premises with all the usual paraphernalia of constabulary, witness-box, and so on. A later Act has taken the Children's Court right away from the police court altogether, and has provided for the presence, in addition to the magistrate, of two justices of the peace, one of whom must be a woman. When the visitor, after a lapse of twelve years, again found herself in one of these nurseries of justice, it was being held in a Mayor's parlour in East London and resembled nothing so much as a board meeting.

A cheerful fire blazed in the grate; at a long polished table sat probation officers and others, both men and women, while about the room stood policemen in civilian attire who were doing their best, though without complete success, to look unlike policemen. There was a general atmosphere of chattiness and urbanity, which, however, flew out of the window when the magistrate, who was quite real, came in at the door. But even he looked more like a managing director, or a father, than a magistrate; and when the first offender was brought in and placed on the right hand of the "Bench," one felt that the child might have been anybody's naughty little son, brought in by the gardener to confess to a parent that he had broken the greenhouse window with a cricket ball. This first impression did not survive the ensuing proceedings, for the gardener became an unmistakable constable when he took the oath, while the charge was of stealing money. It was noticeable that most of the fifteen or sixteen cases on the charge sheet would never have reached a magistrate at all if the small persons concerned in them had been born in

a West End square instead of an East End tenement.

One boy was involved in a raid on a chocolate stall in a street market; another had burgled a shop, looking about as incapable of using a jemmy, or whatever the new Bill Sykes burgles a shop with, as the visitor would have been; a third had stolen a skein of silk, an unchildlike theft that suggested a receiver in the background; a fourth—the only girl that day—had robbed her mother to buy flowers for a favourite teacher, but had also pilfered from the school collecting-box for purposes less appealing to anybody present who in a blameless past had also adored a school teacher. There was a sprinkling of street gambling cases, and of charges against jolly-looking young rascals of playing football in the traffic; but most pathetic of all were the little waifs who had been “found wandering,” and the children who were charged with being “out of control” by a harassed mother from an overcrowded home, or by a father whose nerves had gone to pieces in the war.

The magistrate did his best, in consultation with his colleagues, to give the children a

chance. Most of them were placed on probation, and only a minimum were sent to institutions, generally after every other expedient had been tried. Often, they were put back again into the remand home for observation, and for further reference to their school record, or for special examination by the doctor. A blind man's son who had got into bad company was committed to an industrial school—"not to punish him," the father was told, "but to remove him from his present temptations." One hoped, though unsupported in the hope by his evident distress, that this little delinquent saw his punishment in the same light. It was less harrowing to hear that another child who, having acquired a passion for country life through one brief summer holiday, had twice run away from the institution to which he was committed, was now to have his heart's desire and go to a farm school where he would learn to work on the land.

The magistrate was always kind. Even the football players were fined less for playing with a rag ball than a leather one, on the assumption that the latter argued the possession of more

wealth—a really fine discrimination!—and steps were taken to help them to join a football club. And on inquiring why the stipendiary always noted down the birthday of each child, the visitor learned that it was his custom to send a birthday card every year to all the children that passed through his Court. It was not surprising to hear that many of them continue to write to him after having grown out of his jurisdiction; and he told a good story against himself about one boy, who, on leaving the reformatory, was advised by the superintendent to avoid his old associates when he got back to London. “What?” cried the boy in consternation. “Mayn’t I go to see the magistrate?”

Undoubtedly, the magistrate did his best for the children; and the constables did their best not to behave like constables—although no one but a constable would have portentously described the damage done by three boys to a newly decorated chapel as “scraping the paint off the House of God”—while the delinquents, one felt, were equally doing their best to behave like any other children whose naughtiness makes

us all members of one another. But the visitor came away torn with rage at the thought that if they had really come from a West End square, instead of an East End street where temptations abound and most pleasures are illegal, they might never have been naughty at all—or, at all events, their naughtiness would have been called by the right name.

On Probation

If Bumbledon could be revisited by the horrid tyrants who used to make the childhood of the poor a nightmare, they would probably find the probation officer the most remarkable phenomenon of the new order. The probation officer stands between the juvenile delinquent and the worst consequences of his delinquency, and is a kind of liaison officer operating in a circle within which revolve child and parent and teacher and prosecutor and magistrate. In very nearly all the Children's Courts in London it is the probation officer, man or woman, who, as soon as the wrongdoer is charged and sent

to the remand home—a common procedure nowadays—visits the child's home and school and other haunts likely to be productive of information about his character and environment, in order to get some idea as to what his response to probation is likely to be. The probation officer then prepares a report on the case from this point of view, which is presented to the magistrate together with the official school report that has been drawn up simultaneously by the industrial schools officer of the district. On these two reports the stipendiary largely bases his verdict; and in the majority of cases nowadays, the first offender is placed on probation to be given his chance of reformation without being sent away to the hated certified school.

There are some who think that a flogging would be less trouble to the State, and more beneficial to the delinquent. It would certainly be less trouble to the State—at the time. There are also some who declare lightly that the children try to get placed on probation because it is such fun to be on probation. That seems to call for more comment on the dull lives of the

children than upon the amenities of the probation system; in any case, this writer has yet to find the child who "scrapes the paint off the House of God," or steals chocolates, or kicks a rag ball through the window of a passing taxi-cab, in pursuance of a deep-laid plot to get caught by a "copper" and haled before the "Beak" and finally subjected to the perpetual supervision of a probation officer. The child who could do all that deliberately would make one despair for the first time of the London child.

Fortunately, it does not happen that way. Most of the naughtiness of the Children's Court is unpremeditated, and if it happens to be the other kind, with a nasty grown-up criminal at the back of it, the child rarely gets the chance of being placed on probation, because in that case it is generally thought more desirable to remove the offender right out of the sphere of the bad influence. Besides, the child who pilfers or riots from misdirected energy, or from hunger (physical or spiritual), is not the sort of crafty child who angles for grown-up approval or patronage. At the same time, no one can see

the probation officer at work—the one whom the visitor went to see happened to be a woman—without realising how lucky her young charges are to be living in 1926 instead of 1826, or even 1900, for that matter !

There she sits, on a Saturday morning, in her pleasant room with its flowers and its open windows and its lending library of story-books, interviewing in turn the children on her Saturday roll who come to report to her.

“ Well, George ! Kept your promise this week, son ? ”

“ Yes, miss ! Please, miss, I’ve got a job ! ” Particulars of the job follow, and the probation officer, though ready with her congratulations, talks seriously. George is told that it is one thing to go about damaging people’s property when you are a schoolboy, but quite another when you are fifteen and a wage-earner ; and no one will excuse him if he behaves henceforth in this childish manner—to all of which George appears to pay proper attention, though this may be an optimistic view to take. But his belief in the omnipotence of the lecturer is undoubted, and it is hard to persuade him that

she really cannot produce a ticket for the next local excursion to Southend. It appears that the children of this neighbourhood gaily exploit all the religious sects there are, and will go to Southend with different Sunday schools on three days in the same week, when the season of treats is at its height.

“If I were to provide tickets for treats, there really would be a rush to get on probation,” she observes as she hands him over to the visitor to be given a book from the library. “Don’t give the ‘Pilgrim’s Progress’ to an orthodox Jew, as one of my other helpers did,” she adds in an aside. But she need not worry, for not one of her young hopefuls, this morning, asks for anything but “adventures, please, wiv lots of fighting and shipwrecks!”

Sometimes, it is an older boy who comes to report about a young delinquent to whom he has been asked to extend a friendly hand. He was evidently chosen with discrimination for this difficult job, because there is nothing of the “good boy” about him, while a strong bond of humour seems to exist between him and the probation officer.

“Hullo, Harry boy! How is William getting on? Has he been caught yet by the police?”

“Nearly, miss; last night, there was a lot of fellers fighting down our street, and William was leading them——”

“He would be!” To the visitor a word of explanation is thrown: “William was one of three boys who committed a highway robbery in the Park. Really rather bad, you know; and poor Charlie had to go to a naval school, hadn’t he, Harry? John kept his promise and is doing splendidly; but William got into trouble again when he went into camp, which was tragic. But he’s keeping his promise now, isn’t he, Harry?”

“Yes, miss—’cepting that he climbed some railings on Sunday, and the p’leece thought he was going to damage ’em——”

“Well, he probably was! I’m glad he’s escaped so far. Keep him interested, won’t you? He only wants lots to do; and if he’s caught again, it means a reformatory.”

Once, it is a tired mother, with a baby in arms and a toddler tugging at her skirt. She comes to bring a letter about Fanny, described

afterwards to the visitor as having been "an experienced shop-lifter for four years," evidently working for a professional receiver who has not yet been traced. Fanny, aged eleven, has good parents, her father drawing a war pension that would enable him to pay a fairly high rent ; but no decent accommodation is to be had, so the family has to live, all four in one room, in a dilapidated house where the ceiling falls in lumps and mice run over the bed. The high-spirited little Fanny sought her own way of escape from these delectable surroundings, and is now being given a last chance on probation in a country cottage, where, according to the foster-mother's letter, "she is getting along comfortable and saying her grace good."

"It will mean her ruin if she comes home before you've moved out of that neighbourhood," says the probation officer emphatically. "The trouble would only start all over again, and after that she'd go from reformatory to prison, and be in and out of Holloway all the rest of her days ; and that's no kind of a life at all !" Fanny's prospects of having any other kind of a life seem, however, slight, if they

depend upon her parents finding a decent house to live in.

But it was the children actually interviewed who impressed the visitor most, the day she sat in that pleasant official room, and impressed her especially with a sense of what probation means to girls and boys whose craving for pretty things or for excitement has landed them in the Children's Court. They sat in a row on the bench in the passage outside, waiting to be interviewed. They were all boys, as it happened, and included one who had led a lawless career in the streets, "because, as you might say, he has several fathers and one or two mothers!"—another who robbed the gas meter and went to the pictures on the proceeds; and a third who was pronounced an "incipient criminal" by an old-fashioned schoolmaster—"He isn't, you know! Just energy, and nothing interesting to do!"—but who, on account of his merry grin had been nicknamed Felix by the more modern teacher who had now taken over the school and seemed better able to understand high spirits than his predecessor had been. Among all these children

“on probation,” there did not seem to be one whose face showed “delinquency,” though every one looked ill-nourished, ill-clothed and under-developed.

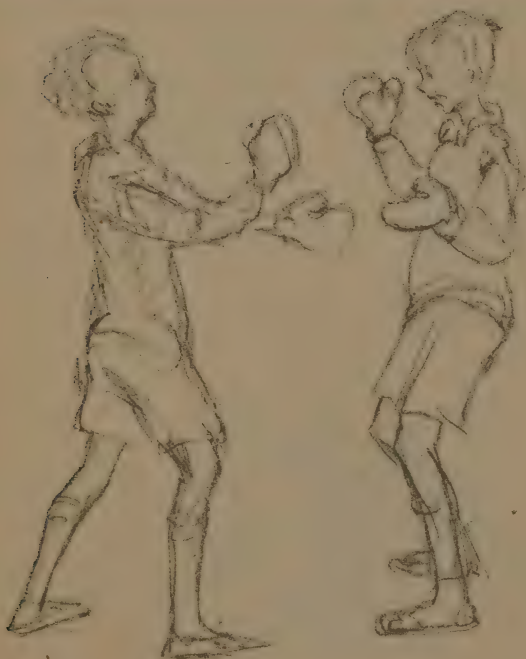
The visitor, as usual, went away aching to upset the universe. But after her went the cheery voice of the practical and capable woman who wastes no time in useless repining, but just tackles the problem as it arises: “Well, Jacky boy, kept your promise this week?”

The Certified School

If the first cause of delinquency is poverty, the second is probably defective education, arising out of the limitations of the elementary school and the early age at which the children leave school. The provision of good boarding-schools would therefore seem to be one solution of the problem presented by these boys and girls of poor neighbourhoods, who are not necessarily more wicked than their fellows, but are often more intelligent, and who nearly always respond quickly to intelligent methods

of filling their minds and occupying their idle hands. Unfortunately, with the exception of one or two private enterprises, such as the Caldecott Community, there are no boarding-schools open to the children of the poor unless they have a penal taint.

The horror of the Home Office certified school, whether industrial or reformatory, is so



widespread among the poor that it is quite un-availing to point out to them that their children will get an excellent education at one of these institutions. That is generally true; and it is also true that many boys and girls are happy in such schools, and turn out splendidly afterwards, and revisit their old school oftener than most Harrovians and Etonians revisit theirs. The fact remains that there is all the difference in the world between "going to school," as children go from middle-class homes, and being "committed to school" by a magistrate. And the difference is felt so acutely by the scholars that one superintendent told the present writer that he always wrote to old boys on plain note-paper because he knew they liked to conceal

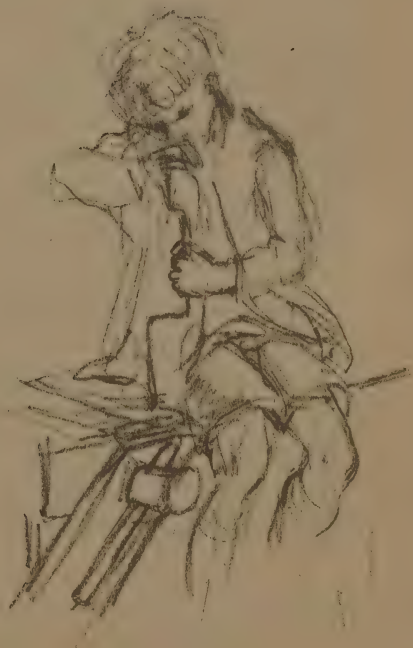
from their
wives or
friends that
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ed at such a
place.

Occasional
s c a n d a l s



have aggravated the general prejudice against State boarding schools, and their institutional character is naturally accentuated if the safeguarding regulations, allowing children to see their parents and to write home frequently, are not complied with. Even if no obstacle is placed in the way of their receiving visits, this is often impracticable owing to the poverty of parents and the situation of the schools.

A London boy committed to a Lancashire industrial school at the age of eleven, for instance, may quite possibly never see his parents again until he is allowed to leave school at sixteen. Similarly, the theoretical power to change a child's school if he is not getting on well is rarely



exercised, owing to the many difficulties standing in the way ; so the poor little square peg often has to remain in the round hole, sometimes for five or six years. But, of course, the gravest objection to such schools is the common objection to all institutions—that the inmates are in the power of officials, and officials, like other human beings, may be good or bad. All this is of the greater significance when the inmates have no choice in the matter of going there, and their parents are expected to contribute to the school fees.

Still, some of the schools are very fine places, and the officials at the head of them are often very fine people. At one of the best, the superintendent was so popular that although no gate was ever locked, the boys did not seem to want to escape more than any healthy boy wants to run away from school ; and their habit of revisiting their school in after life sometimes became a little embarrassing, although the superintendent told the visitor, “ I never refuse an old boy.” The boys had plenty of liberty at this school, and were even free of the orchard. “ I don’t mind the fruit disappearing as long

as they leave enough for jam," observed this head-master with a humorous twinkle; "but I do wish they'd wait till it is ripe." His older boys went home on Sundays when this was practicable, and the general atmosphere of the place testified to its being one of the best examples of its kind. But, of course, it is not the good school that gives such schools a bad name; and the more enlightened children's magistrate, in these days, generally shows some reluctance in committing children to them.

One alternative is that of sending young delinquents to cottage homes, where they can attend the ordinary village school and lead a normal child's life. One of these certified homes, where four or five little London girls and boys were living, seemed to the visitor rather more like a reward for being good than a punishment for being naughty. The very human woman who ran it, took one's breath away, to begin with, by remarking casually, "Punishments? Oh, if the children are a nuisance to the others, we sometimes send them to sit by themselves; and if they come in late for meals they have to go without. The

villagers sometimes wonder why they are never smacked ; but they haven't grasped our point of view, that if a child is naughty it may possibly be our fault, not his ! ”

One felt that the villagers might be pardoned for their slowness in grasping this point of view ; for the naughtiness did sometimes look rather like original sin. Jim, for instance, was clearly to be held solely responsible for the ingenious suggestion that the water might freeze and make people fall down, if he did as he was told, one particularly soft warm morning, and washed out the porch ! Jim's mother, by the way, who came from the Salvation Army shelter—her only home—to stay with Jim for a week, asked the neighbours in bewilderment, “ Are they as kind as that to my boy when I'm not here ? ”

But there is not very much to be said about a certified home of this sort, because, as the superintendent would tell you, “ it is only like any other home in the village.” Perhaps it is ; but it must, for all that, offer to its young inmates a glorious deliverance from a life in which one had perpetually to dodge the police,

and never had enough to eat, or a clean airy bedroom, or fresh and pretty clothes to wear. And I doubt if any other home in the village could produce a little wisp of nine who looked five and seemed incapable of learning to read, though she could pick up any poem orally and repeated Blake's "Little lamb, who made thee?" in a way that clearly showed Blake had written it for small delinquents who do not fit into the social system as it is.

A good many experiments of the kind are being made nowadays, and the Home Office school appears destined ultimately to disappear. But there seems no reason why these educational barracks should not be made into new and attractive boarding-schools, where prevention would take the place of cure, and to which children could be sent without being naughty first and without being compelled to feel ashamed of the fact ever after. I suppose the trouble is that we have not yet made up our minds whether we want to regard the juvenile delinquent as a child to be punished or a child to be redeemed.

Exploitation

The exploitation of the child has undergone various changes since the time of Jo the crossing-sweeper; and no little boy nowadays sweeps either a crossing or a chimney. From time to time, various Acts find their way on to the statute book with the object of decreasing grown-up opportunities for making money out of child labour. But it sometimes seems as though many of the worst cases still go undetected because they are not obvious to the eye; and while the playtime of schoolboys is more or less safeguarded—not wholly, of course—the playtime of schoolgirls is still considered to be quite appropriately spent in domestic slavery in the home. “Helping mother,” and all the real toil this involves, can hardly be reached by any law as long as mother needs the help so badly and educational authorities lay so much stress on domestic science in the schools.

There is another class of exploited children whom the law only partly protects, when it

can catch them, by charging them in the Children's Court with having been "found wandering," a procedure that ensures some sort of home and education for the child whose parents are in this way proved to be non-existent or unfit to look after the child. But there remains the more subtly exploited child, who is not



delivered from bad parents because they drag it round with them from place to place, never stay long enough in one borough to come under the notice of the authorities, and therefore succeed in evading both police and school inspectors. These people live by begging, not openly in the street but at the door, where they present some plausible tale or other to account for their being temporarily homeless and in want of funds. As they have generally come down from a rather better station in life than that of the usual poor, they more easily escape detection than if they paraded the streets in rags; and their unfortunate children are victims of the subterfuge.

Stephen wandered in this way across a painter's path, one autumn day, and vanished into oblivion, like many another of these respectable-looking little victims who suffer for the selfish stupidity of feckless parents, and perhaps end in the grown-up police court because they were not caught young enough to be saved from the inevitable rot of vagabondage.

Stephen

Stephen sighed as he began the long ascent to the fifth floor. His boots, which were like two torture chambers to his smarting feet, had seen better days. So had Stephen. He could remember a little clean house, with a lilac bush in front and a bathroom upstairs where he was washed all over every night with warm water. He could remember when his threadbare dusty suit was a new black velvet one, made for a party at which he recited "My bed is like a little boat" and was acclaimed a dramatic genius.

All that was four years ago, before father got lost abroad and the money ceased to come by post. Stephen was nearly ten now, and in his dreary little life there were no parties, and no lilac bush, and no father who quarrelled with mother when he had been drinking, but was kind to Stephen all the rest of the time, and taught him to hold his head up and breathe with his mouth shut. There was nothing nice

in his life now—only an endless tramp through London streets by day, and indescribable experiences by night.

In Stephen's better days mother never used to send him knocking at strange doors with letters for charitable householders written on cheap note-paper. She was prettily dressed then, and full of laughter, not the queer bundle of clothes she was now, given to gloomy moods that terrified him. Not that she ever ill-treated him. When he succeeded on his begging adventures she always made much of him; and they would have plenty to eat and drink while the money lasted. After that, it began all over again, the endless dragging about from one part of London to another, the impatient people who shut the door in their face, and the empty sick feeling inside.

The stone stairs seemed interminable. They had slept on Hampstead Heath last night, after escaping from a suspicious policeman; and it had rained heavily. His legs had sharp pains in them, like pins and needles that didn't go away. Once, he paused and peered down between the rails of the balusters at the large,

inert, flabby woman who sat hunched up on the bottom step, waiting for him. For one wild rebellious moment, he contemplated going down and begging to be let off this once. But as he hesitated, she looked up and made a peremptory gesture with her hand; and his heart turned heavy as lead again, as he started on the next flight of stairs.

What should he do if the lady frowned and said she could not possibly help them again? Or if she asked him searching questions about his parents, as people sometimes did, to which he did not know the answers? His mother had impressed upon him that he was to begin to cry if the lady seemed likely to shut the door on him. It wouldn't matter, she said, if it wasn't real crying. He must pretend. The lady would be sure to give him money then; and they could have a grand supper and a roof over their heads for the night.

Unfortunately, he had never felt less able to cry. His misery was like a hot fire that burnt him up inside and left his eyes dry and scorched. Perhaps if he rubbed them hard at the important moment, the tears would come. He hoped so,

for he did not want to disappoint the flabby woman who sat waiting on the bottom stair, though she did give him horrible things to do. For his own sake, he did not care very much whether he succeeded or not. There was a time—it might have been this morning, or it might have been yesterday—when he was hungry enough to look in the gutter for chance scraps of food. But now he did not feel hungry any more. It was a good thing, he reflected, not to be hungry when there was nothing to eat.

Only one more flight. He could not determine whether he was glad or sorry to be so near the end of his journey. It was the steepest flight of all. He never remembered anything so steep, except the mountain in his bad dream, down which he slipped backwards. He felt like slipping backwards now; and he gave an involuntary little scream as he clutched at the baluster and so dragged himself at last to his destination.

“She’s gone away, and the flat is let,” said the man who opened the door. The timid knock had disturbed him at his work, and he

did not wait to see the effect of his brusque dismissal. It was not until he had got back to the picture he was painting that the vision of the singularly graceful child on the doormat, standing up so straight in his shabby genteel suit, smote upon his artist's consciousness. But when he returned to the door, Stephen was gone.

On the bottom step a spineless heap of human failure heaved itself up.

"Didn't you cry?" asked Stephen's mother reproachfully, when he had recounted his failure with his head held up, though his little chest heaved up and down with soundless sobs.

"Not till afterwards," answered the boy who had remained incorrigibly truthful through all adversity.

CHAPTER X

BEING ILL

The School Clinic

“WELL, Tommy, is that the same finger I saw in March?” asks the doctor of a small boy with a pinched and eager face, who has just been led into the clinic by a slightly older sister.

“No, miss!” in a tone full of reproach at such a lapse of memory.

“I beg your pardon, I’m sure!” She consults his register on the card handed her by the attendant nurse. “Let’s have a look at it, old son.”

The finger is shown with some pride. “It’s busted, miss.”

“So I see. You’re the boy who wouldn’t take the malted oil, aren’t you? Ah!” She writes something on his card; he is passed on to the capable-looking woman, representing the L.C.C., who keeps the clinic register and endeavours to get the doctor’s recommendations

carried into effect; and finally, he goes into the next room to have the finger dressed.

Another child, this time a tiny girl with a fine mop of yellow curls, stands before the doctor, who explains to all who may be interested that the curls are the result of X-rays, applied to cure ringworm. "Yes," corroborates a proud mother; "straight as string it was before she got the ringworm, and now her sister's that jealous . . . !"

Everybody present sees ringworm in a new light as this patient is discharged and goes off in pleasant consciousness of being in some way a celebrity.

A starved-looking older girl replaces her, suffering



from a bad cold as well as conjunctivitis—or what the visitor in the room has always called a plain squint—presenting a pitiful appearance to the doctor, who regards her thoughtfully. “What about Swanley?” she says over her shoulder to the L.C.C. lady, and the sufferer is passed on to be entered as a candidate for the Council boarding-school at Swanley, where embryo eye cases are sent, sometimes for a year or more, and many cures are effected.

“Bend your knee, old thing,” says the doctor’s breezy voice. “Ah, you’ve been scratching that, haven’t you?” Vigorous denial from the boy concerned, who has never dreamt



of doing anything so wicked. "Well, don't scratch it any more," is the admonition with which he goes off to be registered for surgical dressings.

A boy with an improved chest is discharged and encouraged to go on swimming; and after him a girl, suffering terribly from ear-ache but wonderfully stoical about it, enters with her mother. Everybody present considers different expedients of an urgent nature, and she is sent off with a doctor's letter to a specialist at the hospital. But most of the "minor ailments" treated at this school clinic in the East End are poisoned sores and cuts, attributable, the doctor says, to bad air and wrong feeding, both of which soon magnify into wounds little injuries that a healthy child in healthy surroundings could contract with impunity.

All the children in the London elementary schools are medically examined four times in their school career, at the ages of five, eight, twelve and fourteen, and when recommended for treatment may go on—it is not compulsory—to a school clinic, if there is one, and thence to a treatment centre, if there is one. But there

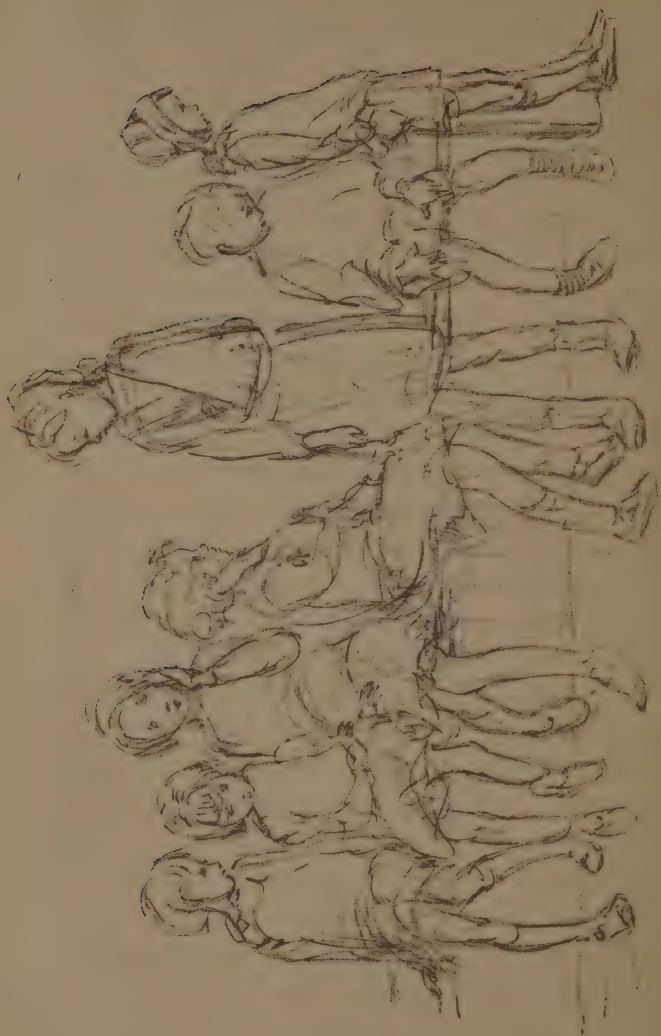
is not always one or the other ; and even when both are available, as at this Wapping centre, the slackness, poverty, or some other disability of the parents may cause a hitch to occur between the recommendations of the clinic doctor and their fulfilment.

A pathetic little ragged and undeveloped child, whose eyesight has deteriorated since her last examination, confesses that mother has done nothing about the spectacles that were ordered, because " she says she can't afford to buy them." A grown-up adviser present says, " Tell teacher, and see what she can do about it " ; the older child who accompanies the patient nods intelligently, and they both depart. If any confirmation were needed of the maturity of little children of the poor, it would be provided by the school clinic, where the youthful guardians who accompany the patients often seem more capable of receiving the doctor's instructions than their parents are.

The doctor realises this, in more ways than one ; when, for instance, she seriously explains to one bright boy the cause of his swollen glands and in what way he can help to cure

them ; or, on the other hand, when she advises a little girl to continue to attend school, “ because you’ll be better at school than at home with that knee.”

Outside, on a bench in the hall, sit a row of clinic children waiting for admission to the treatment room, which they attend as many times weekly as their card requires them to do, reporting again to the doctor as instructed. They do not look very miserable about it, either now or on any “ minor-ailments morning ” in the week ; for anything, even a surgical dressing, makes a change in the daily routine, and change is what the London child adores. Besides, it is really rather fun in the treatment room, where cheery young nurses in blue linen frocks, with a lot of white cap and apron about them, receive the patients and give them toys to play with while their sores are being dressed. And there is always the excitement of being a little different from other children, when one emerges from the centre with a leg or an arm bandaged, although it is not given to every child to have a magnificent head bandage, as in the case of the small boy the visitor saw,



whose scalp wound was the admiration of envious onlookers.

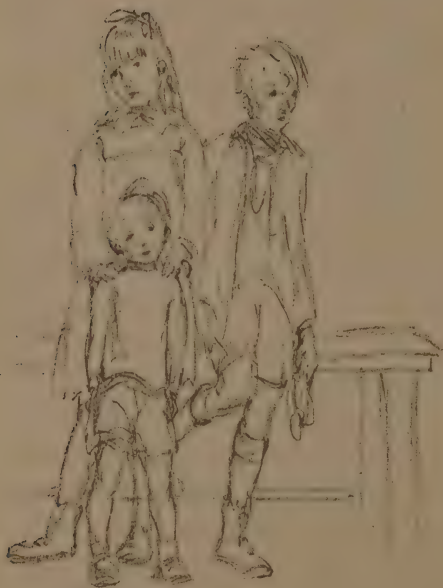
The attendance of two hundred patients annually, of whom a hundred-and-twenty may be eye patients, constitutes a whole-time school clinic with a claim to a grant from the London County Council in the form of capitation fees ; but the Council does not necessarily provide either school clinic or treatment centre, and there is some resemblance to the traditional bell-rope without a bell in the statutory provision of school medical examination without the statutory provision of a clinic to follow it up, or of treatment centres to follow up the clinic. Fortunately, a bell is pretty frequently attached to the other end of the rope, either by private enterprise, as in the clinic just described, or by the municipality, as at Bermondsey, whose local Council even goes to the length of running a free dental clinic, not only for children of school age, but for babies and toddlers as well.

“ Yes, I am the best hated man in Bermondsey,” says the man in the starched white coat, with a charming smile that belies his own statement. Yet he should be the most

beloved ; for out of 1,100 babies and toddlers, under the age of five, whom he has seen in five years, over eight hundred needed his treatment, without which they would probably have grown up with the C₃ teeth so common in this country. On an average, he has found that the teeth of eighty per cent. of the children who come to him between the ages of three and fourteen, require attention ; and even tiny

babies do not manage to escape this kindly monster, who entices them into his shining white room as the spider enticed the unwary fly.

"I begin by making friends with the baby,"



he explains, and no one looking at him can doubt the capitulation of the baby. Perhaps the baby does not in the process entirely lose faith in human nature, for gas is applied as in the case of a grown-up patient, so the tricked infant probably never knows what has really taken place in that spider's parlour. The big man in the white coat gets plenty of variety, it appears. "In one morning," he observes reminiscently, "I treated two babies of fourteen and five months respectively, and an old lady of eighty-one!"

He seemed quite surprised when the visitor, although extremely laudatory of his humane work among the babies and children of South-East London, declined his pressing invitation to stay and see them being operated upon.

The Hospital

Most people know about the admirable work that is done in the large children's hospitals, where little Londoners have such a good time that they are objects of envy to their brothers and sisters who have not the good fortune to

be ill. But there are innumerable cases for whom room cannot be found in these hospitals, and who are not eligible for admittance to the general hospital because they are either too young or require too lengthy treatment. In search of these children who are overlooked in our public health system, the visitor found herself one day in a toddler's hospital in North Kensington, founded in memory of two women who spent their lives in caring for children—Mary Middleton and Margaret MacDonald—and there made the acquaintance of quite a number of small patients, drafted on from the babies' clinic in connection with it, because they needed the regular care and treatment the day clinic could not give them.

Some of them were suffering from serious ailments, others from the usual malnutrition and want of fresh air. "If six people are living in one room, naturally there is not enough air for the baby," was all the doctor said, as she stood by the cot of one infant who was simply "wasting."

Here, too, was a babe of twenty months, whose weight had risen in less than three weeks

from twenty to twenty-three pounds ; the family income was twenty-four shillings a week, and it was a marvel, said the matron, that its mother kept the children so clean. The visitor felt, not for the first time in her wanderings through back streets, that if she ever had to join the ranks of the poor, it should be those of the undeserving poor who put food before soap in importance. It was almost a relief to hear that the days were numbered of one poor little cot case, a moaning infant suffering from disease as well as the underfeeding of its mother.

But childhood, especially London childhood, seems capable of triumphing over nearly everything. Here was Violet, who had assembled every toy animal she could find across a doorway, and seemed a little hurt when told that this was not considered officially a good site for a stable. And here too was Herbert, a tiny boy with "an infinite capacity for self-pity," as a voluntary worker put it, and destined, she was sure, to be a great comedian.

It was pleasant to find in this worker the right kind of grown-up helper, who could deal unerringly with the needs and aspirations of the

hospital toddler. She told me how the little romp, now blissfully dribbling on her shoulder, learned to walk at the hospital, and amid the tremulous admiration of his companions carried the largest Teddy Bear in the place the whole length of the room; also, how she had turned a cot into a Zoo, and a quadruped of doubtful species into an elephant, and taken the whole ward on an imaginary excursion to Regent's Park. "And when everything else fails," she added, "I deal out 'bus tickets all round, and that keeps them quiet for hours!"

It seems a queer city, thought the visitor, that cannot satisfy the wants of children who ask no more of a grown-up world than sunlight and air and food and milk—and for playtime, a handful of used omnibus tickets, or any other stuff that dreams are made of.

But the grown-up world sometimes tries to do its best, especially in the way of sunlight; for when Nature fails to play up, as she does fail more often than not in the London that one loves, open-air treatment or the use of the sun-lamp frequently takes its place. The sun-bathing centre at Ken Wood, and the open-air

school of the Children's Adoption Society, Leytonstone, where the little pupils study and draw and play, clad almost solely in their skins and without a roof over their heads, are two philanthropic examples of the new sun-worship as applied to normal children ; while sick children are being similarly treated in innumerable hospitals and clinics and welfare centres, whenever the money can be found for the installation of violet rays to take the place of a coy London sun.

For several years, beginning before the spread of the modern sunlight cult, this treatment has been given to about nine hundred of London's schoolchildren at St. Mary's Hospital, Carshalton, which, for some reason that cannot even be guessed by one who never ceases to marvel at the vagaries of officialism, is under the jurisdiction of the Metropolitan Asylums Board. The day it happened to be visited, the sun was for once behaving so well that one envied the equanimity of happy patients who had been there long enough to lie fully exposed to it, wearing the lightest of linen garments, with a bandage or linen hat on the head. It is true

that a few of the bare legs had been washed over with some solution to protect them, which made them look like young fruit trees. But the majority were burnt to the colour of Zulus and had got far beyond the stage of a peeling skin.

They seemed happy enough in most cases, and on excellent terms with doctors and nurses that did not seem to be affected even by the sad necessity of school. For, since the treatment rarely lasts less than a year and frequently extends to four years, education is essential unless cure is to mean illiteracy; so those who are well enough attend classes in the big airy hall, while others are taught in the open air as they lie on their backs.

Being cured seemed to be full of variety at this big nursery of a hospital. In the gymnasium, a little sufferer from paralysis of the shoulder was curing himself unawares through the absorbing occupation of transferring, with one hand and the use of a rubber syringe, the water from one basin to another. A boy, to correct facial paralysis, sat grimacing in front of a mirror in order to make the crooked side

of his face correspond to the other. He had been told that when he could whistle properly he should go home to his mother; and what boy would object to being given unlimited permission to make faces and whistle? He was said to be rapidly improving.

In the bathroom, a joyous youngster sat in a "whirlpool bath," sailing boats and ducks on a stormy sea and getting all sorts of magnetic advantages from it. Out in the garden, a dozen chattering little girls, recovering from pulmonary tuberculosis, swayed to and fro in a great swing; and a jolly sunburnt baby, saved from "wasting," sat crowing in a perambulator. An X-ray photograph of a boy who had swallowed a peg-top completed the picture in the visitor's mind of the universality of childhood, sick or well.

Going Away to Get Well

When you are a sick London child, there are all sorts of ways—though never enough ways, alas!—of going away to get well. There are not many children in Council schools who do

not get some kind of a summer holiday nowadays, through the elaborate organization which has grown out of the Children's Country Holiday Fund that was started in the nineteenth century; but this is intended for the healthy children. If you are sick or convalescent, some other organization must help you to go away. The London Council runs some schools, like the one at Swanley, where sick children are educated and cured at the same time; it also provides first-rate camp schools at Bushey, Margate and St. Leonard's, to which ailing London schoolchildren, generally the "milk children" who are not definitely ill, but are sufficiently below par to be ordered milk by the school doctor, may be sent in relays for six weeks at a time.

Philanthropic organizations supplement these efforts, such as the Save the Children Fund, which has started a campaign for the establishment of another seaside residential school, somewhat on the lines of the L.C.C. camp schools, also for the milk children. Another interesting private enterprise is that of the Hospitality Committee of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, which

busies itself in finding homes, generally middle-class homes, in which hospitality can be extended for short or long periods to one or more London children who badly need a holiday from the airless homes in which they live. This scheme has double-edged results, and blesseth him who gives as well as him who takes in rather an extraordinary manner.

The hostess who takes a little boy or girl from poorer London into her own comfortable home, to live for a time with her own children and share all their occupations and advantages, learns much that she did not know before about the way the other half of the world lives all the time. She encounters for the first time children who have to be persuaded that they may eat as much as they want without fear of depriving somebody else or of not leaving enough for the morrow, children who have so much sleep to make up that when they first arrive in a quiet country house, where their rest is miraculously undisturbed, they frequently sleep the clock round, and seem, as one hostess wrote, "as if they could not get enough sleep." Lasting friendships, too, are often formed between

the little guests and the children of their hostess, begun by some letter of impetuous invitation, such as the following: "Dear friend, will you come and stay with me and play in the woods and fields and garden I have a cat—Angela."

These children's friendships help to throw many a bridge across a chasm that might otherwise have remained impassable; from Wapping, maybe, whence Elsie came one summer, to Devonshire, where Mary, who had never before looked over the edge of her cultured home with its ordered flower garden, learned of another kind of home in which a plenteous larder was as unknown as a hot-and-cold water supply.

Elsie

"My dear," said the Squire's wife, who was a kind woman, "I should love to take one of the poor little kiddies and feed him up, and all that——"

"You're a darling," said her old school friend, getting her fountain-pen into action. "I'll send in your name at once."

“ Oh, Laura, don’t be so dreadfully committee-ish,” begged the other. “ You see, I must consider my own chicks a little. Supposing I took a child from the slums, and he didn’t fit in with mine—well, they haven’t been used to children of that sort, and he mightn’t fit in.”

“ He certainly wouldn’t,” agreed the doctor’s wife. “ Elsie from Wapping didn’t fit in with my Mary when she first came.”

“ Does she now?” asked her friend, to gain time.

Laura laughed. “ Come down the garden and see,” she advised.

At the end of the garden, over a rivalry of dolls, the process of “ fitting in ” with the docker’s child from East London was proceeding a little strenuously.

“ Why can’t we have just a dolls’ tea party ? ” pouted the country child. “ I don’t know what a welfare is.”

“ Don’tcher know what a welfare is ? ” was the surprised comment. “ Nor yet a babies’ clinic ? Why, wherever do you take your baby to when she has fits ? ”

“ She doesn’t never have fits,” said Mary, patting the pretty frock of a passive waxen beauty.

"Anyhow," continued Elsie, refusing to consider a situation in which babies did not have fits, "you don't have tea parties when there's nothink but bread an' marge in the house. For a tea party you've gotter have a cake set on lace paper, and a tin of condensed."

"Real milk is better than condensed," remarked Mary with a complacent smile. "There's no—no nourishment in condensed milk. Daddy says so."

"I like milk wiv a taste in it myself," was the arrogant reply. "So does my baby," she added, rocking the bundle of rags with a featureless fact that she had so far refused to supplant by any doll offered to her by her new friends.

"My baby's been brought up on real milk. You've only got to look at her to see that," said a worm that was beginning to turn.

Elsie looked, and a wave of jealousy suddenly surged over her. "I am looking at her," she cried. "And she's not much to look at, neither. If there was to be dip-theria about, she'd get it and pop off in two ticks, I give you my word she would! And then she'd be nailed up in a coffin and go to the cimitry. Sure as sure."

Mary gazed in stupefaction. "But there isn't dip-dip-theria here," she protested, feeling quite unable to cope with the rest of Elsie's dismal prophecies.

"There's always dip-theria in the street where I come from," retorted Elsie. "You don't know Wapping, do you?"

"I don't want to know it," was the feeble reply. "I'd simply hate to know it. I'm sure it's a horrid place, so there!"

"Well, you gotter live where you're borned," said the little fatalist from dockland. "It ain't no use making a song about it."

"Why not?" asked Mary restively. "I'd make a song about it, if I lived in Wapping. I'd complain and complain till it was different—like father did about the village pond. I'd—I'd go to the Queen and tell her about it!"

"Fat lot of good that'd do you," scoffed the experienced one. "She came in a boat once, and our class wore white frocks and sweetly pretty blue sashes and sung to her. You can sing to the Queen, but you can't complain to her."

"Then I'd complain to some one else," declared a resourceful Mary. "Parliament, p'raps. Or the Vicar."

Elsie was a little impressed. "In the hot wevver," she admitted, "the slaughter house smells somethink chronic, not at all like Epping—or here."

Mary dropped her baby carelessly into the geranium bed and sat down on her heels opposite her strange guest. "Do you *want* to go back to Wapping?" she asked shrewdly.

"Yes, I do!" shouted Elsie defiantly. "It's a lovely place, lots nicer than here!" Jealousy gripped her again as she embraced the bundle of rags that typified home and its loyalties to her.

Mary remorselessly followed up her advantage. "O' course, if you lived here always, you'd have to bring your father'n mother, and Gladys and William and Arthur and Vi'let, and all the others I can't remember," she went on, cunningly probing the lure of Wapping as presented to her in Elsie's conversation. "And they'd have enough to eat always, and never go to bed hungry on Thursdays and Fridays and have real milk 'stead of condensed——"

“No, not real milk!” protested Elsie. But her defences were weakened, and she too dropped her doll in the geranium bed as she listened, fascinated, to Mary’s recital of incredible bounties.

“You could have condensed milk on Sundays, p’raps,” allowed the worm that had turned. “But you *would* sooner live here, now wouldn’t you?”

“No!” screamed Elsie. “I wouldn’t! I wouldn’t!” Then she gave in, and flung herself face downwards in the geranium bed and sobbed passionately.

Mary, discomfited, realised that victory was not worth winning; though of course she did not express it that way. “Forgetting her promise to mummy,” was the formula in her mind, as her mother ran forward and found them both in tears.

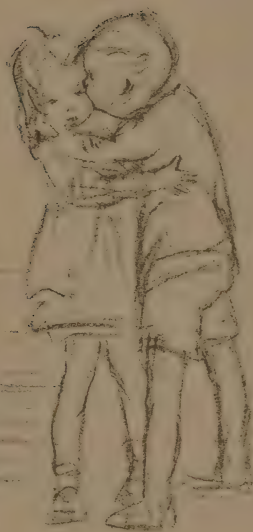
“Oh, Lord!” said the Squire’s wife, as she sometimes did when moved. “I wonder if it would



do my chicks good to have Elsie's brother to play with?"

"I'm certain it would do Elsie's brother good," returned Laura, with the inconsistency that ultimately endeared her to all her friends. But she was hardly responsible for what she said, just then, being engrossed in comforting two puzzled little people whose attempt to reconcile the existence in the same world of Wapping and Devonshire had ended in tears.





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